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## ABSTRACT

This document reports on an examination of lifestyles, cultures, and heritage of Arab communities within the United States. After a historical overview of the arrival and settling of Arab-Americans in wave after wave of immigration, the work provides close-up views of different communities across the country. Each of those views introduces a few of the people who live in the community. The document includes an examination of Arab-American community building, surveying the different regions in which Arab-Americans have built up business, family ties, education, and social life. In addition, the document offers a look backward at the terms of life and the struggle for recognition and identity of the pioneer and forebears of the present generation. Among the many essays that comprise the work are "Detroit: Our Ellis Island" (Jane Peterson); "Arab Muslims in America: Adaptation and Reform" (Yvonne Haddad); and Talbott Williams' "'Pioneers': The Syrian in America." (Author/SG)

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# Taking Root Bearing Fruit



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## The Arab-American Experience

# *Taking Root Bearing Fruit*

*The  
Arab-American  
Experience*



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## **Taking Root Bearing Fruit**

### **Special Issue**

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*ADC Issues* is published by the ADC Research Institute and informs ADC members on issues of special significance. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) is a non-sectarian, non-partisan service organization committed to defending the rights and promoting the heritage of Arab-Americans. The largest grassroots organization of Arab-Americans, ADC was founded in 1980 by former U.S. Senator James Abourezk in response to stereotyping, defamation and discrimination directed against Americans of Arab descent.

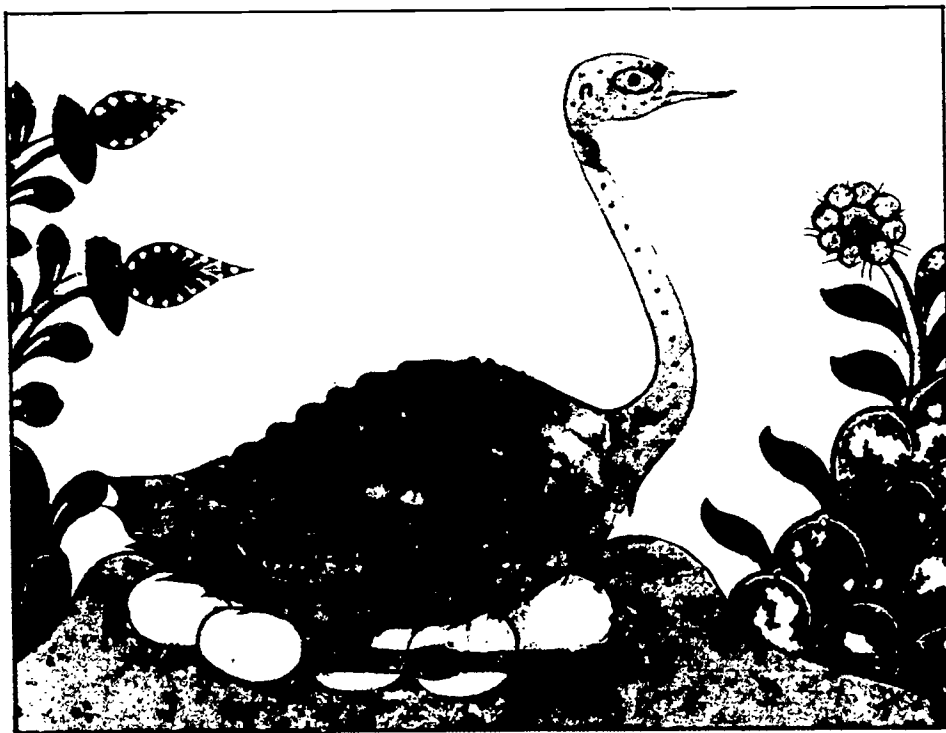
ADC serves its nationwide membership through direct advocacy in cases of defamation, through legal action in cases of discrimination, and through counseling in matters of immigration. The ADC Research Institute publishes information on issues of concern to Arab-Americans and provides educational materials on Arab history and culture as well as the ethnic experience of Arabs in the United States. It also sponsors summer internships in Washington for Arab-American college students. ADC's Middle East Women's and Children's Fund addresses the humanitarian needs of victims of violence in the Middle East.

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**Dedication**  
**For our parents and  
grandparents who came  
to this new world  
bringing nothing but their  
love for our heritage and  
a hope for the future.  
And for our children, to  
whom we bequeath that  
love and that hope.**

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**I**N this issue of *ADC Reports*, we present a project we have been working on and dreaming of for a long time—a survey of the lifestyles, the cultures, the heritage and living pulse of Arab-American communities across the country. After a historical overview of the arrival and settling of Arab-Americans in wave after wave of immigration, we provide close-up views of different communities across the United States. With each one, we introduce you to a few of the people in that community. Following this, we take a bird's-eye view of Arab-American community-building, surveying the different regions in which Arab-Americans have built up businesses, family ties and social life. Finally, we offer a look backward, at the terms of life and the struggle for recognition and identity of the pioneer and forebears of this generation.

We think it is a brave start, and a mark of the coming of age of the Arab-American community, to have this issue of the newsletter. It shows us the strength as well as the diversity of our people. It shows us how we are both Arab and American, and it points a direction for the future that doesn't forget the past.

For people making a brave start, though, we approach you with some trepidation. This we know, is only a beginning, an introduction to an ongoing project of self-description and self-identification, including an annual almanac and continuing updates on our communities through *ADC Reports*. And like all first efforts, this one—we are sure—will have its share of omissions, errors and misstatements. We beg your help in finding those errors and helping us to correct them, in finding those omissions and filling in the gaps in our knowledge. Each mistake, each lacuna is a mark of how important it is to continue this work, to find out what we don't know in order to know ourselves better, and to build for our joint future.

And so we anticipate your interest, and at the same time we beg your indulgence. We hope you judge *ADC* and *ADC Reports*, this issue, not only by its errors but by what new light these initial efforts shed on our community. We realize we have only scratched the surface. There is a greater story to tell, and we promise to tell it.

**James Zogby, Editor**

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*Arab-Americans:  
A  
Tradition  
Takes  
Root*



10

# The Role of Tradition

by John Zogby

**W**E Arab-Americans need to know who we are and where we have been in order to understand where we are going. 1984 is finally here, and perhaps we have grown so accustomed to thinking about its implications that we have forgotten about our past.

Indeed, we live in an era that rejects past and tradition. The overriding passion today is to live for the moment, to live for yourself, not to carry on the tradition of those who preceded you, or to pass on values into the future. We are losing our sense of history. It is no small wonder that more and more people are seeking the aid of psychologists and psychiatrists, health foods, body building, and all the latest fads.

We are losing our ability to communicate with each other. In a fascinating account of 18th century London and Paris, Richard Sennett of Harvard wrote about how strangers meeting in parks or on streets used to speak to each other without embarrassment. You only have to walk down the streets of any big city today to see thousands of people walking past each other totally ignoring each other.

We live in a society that dreads old age and death. The emphasis in America today is on youth, beauty, celebrity, and independence. We have come to believe that all changes are good and that we must adjust ourselves to them even if we can't understand them. Unfortunately,





Newman and Lola McKool left three of their children in Lebanon when they came to America. About 1893, they and their six-year old son, Charles, immigrated to Waco, and began peddling household goods. "Buy, please" and "Thank you" were among the first English words they learned to speak as they sold socks, buttons, needles, and similar articles.

When Charles was eighteen, he returned to Lebanon and got married during a six-month stay (above). Back in America he opened a grocery store in Shreveport, Louisiana; however, his travels were not over. The McKool family moved to New York state for six months and then, in 1917, to Mexico City, where Charles managed an uncle's shoe factory and dry goods store. The family stayed in Mexico for seven years before returning to the United States to settle at Dallas. There, Charles McKool was active in the restaurant business until his death in 1947 (from *The Syrian and Lebanese Texans*).

what this tells young people is that traditional authority figures like parents, teachers and clergy represent the past, and have nothing to teach them. Worse yet, the elderly are treated as people who should be pushed aside because they have nothing to produce or useful to teach the rest of us. We see these messages constantly in jokes about the elderly on television, and we also see the family undermined in popular television shows where father no longer knows best but the ultimate sources of wisdom in each family are the youngsters.

We no longer live or plan for the future. The fear of nuclear war makes people not even think about the future, inflation makes people forget about investment and savings, and advertising carries the message that only fools put off until tomorrow the fun that they could have today. If visitors from another planet came and viewed television and radio advertising they would wonder about the health of a society that promotes the endless purchasing of unnecessary goods as a way of life, as an answer to loneliness and sickness or bad breath.

Modern technology and life chip away at the importance of family in the lives of people, not only through television but also the home computer. I don't see anything exciting at all about people being able to do their shopping and communicating without ever leaving home, cutting down on the few opportunities to socialize that still exist. And recent reports in the Associated Press describe that many wives are already complaining about husbands spending more time on the home computer than with the family. I also fear widespread use of the computer in the classroom. *Psychology Today* magazine reports that children will be able to go directly to the computer and learn directly from it. Now children are told they can learn more from an electronic box than from an adult.

We have to restore authority and respect for adulthood before we raise a generation of lost, aimless people. And we must restore the authority and respect of the family, where traditionally each person has had a special role.

Children must be taught not only to

respect their elders but that the strong must take care of the weak. And we must restore our respect for our own traditions, honoring the importance of cultural memory for every group in American society.

In the long run, we are talking about putting this nation of individuals back together.

As Arab-Americans we are fortunate.

We have a rich history, a great tradition, a valuable source of strength amidst the pressures of modern life. In this special issue of *ADC Reports* we put our best foot forward by presenting selected vignettes about our families and neighborhoods, our institutions, leaders and friends—in short, our culture and our tradition. Sit back, enjoy the reading, and above all, be proud of who you are. ■



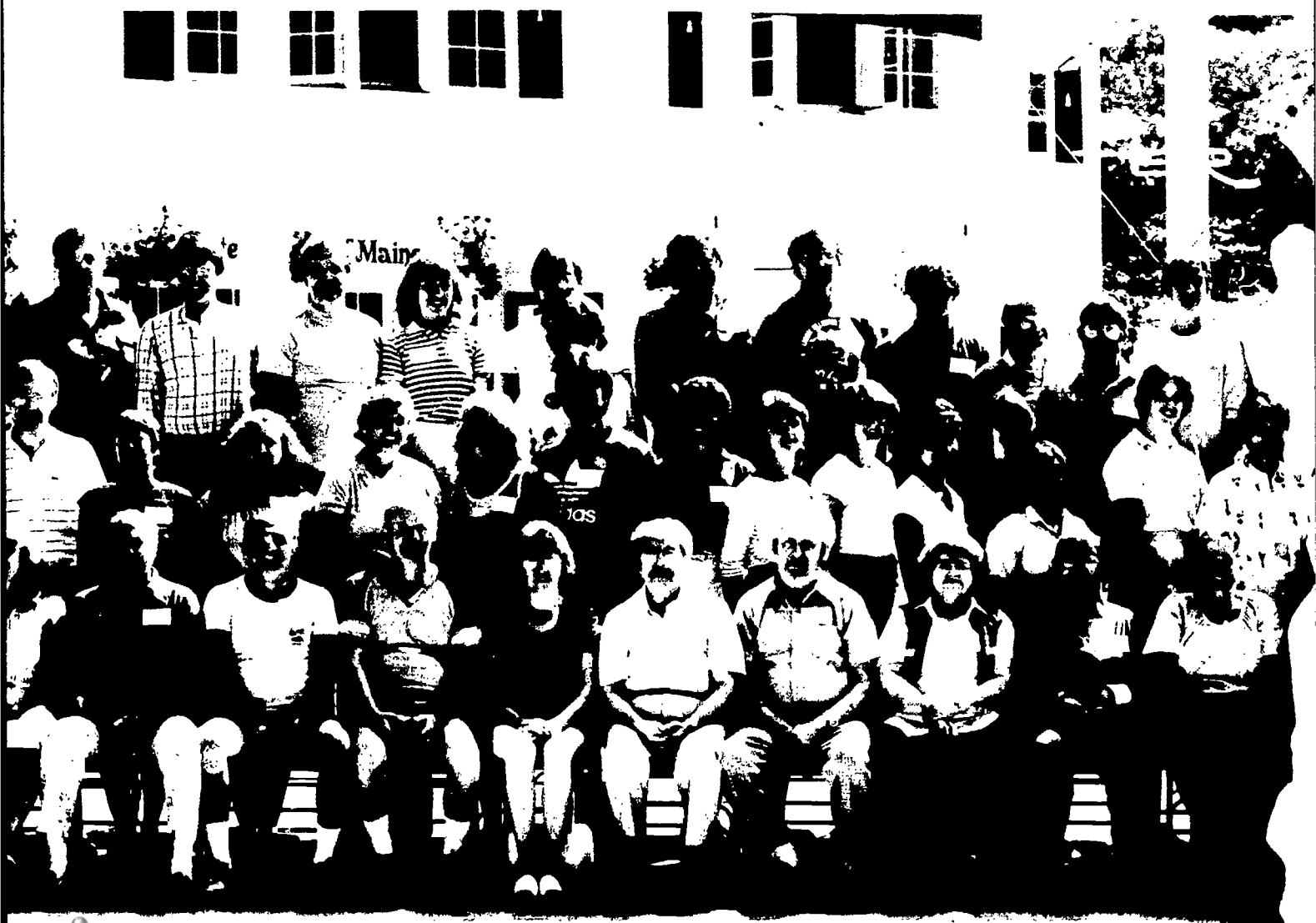
Photo: The Syrian and Lebanese Texans

The Abraham Kazen family of Laredo, Texas became renowned in Texas for its dedication and service to the legal profession. All four boys pictured here became lawyers in their adult life.

## The Burgeoning Family

**T**he Karter Family Reunion at Lakewood, Maine in August 1983. The 150-plus persons in the photograph represent 80 percent of the living descendants and spouses of three brothers—Boulus, Elias, and Charles—who immigrated from Lebanon and settled in Waterville, Maine in the early 1900s.













# Old Roots— New Soil

by Mary Ann Fay

**B**ETWEEN 1890 and 1920 masses of emigrants from southern and central Europe and the Middle East rediscovered America. Leaving behind critical food shortages, stagnant economies and political and religious repression, these men and women set out to carve a future from a dream.

Among those millions of immigrants were Arabs from Greater Syria—a region that included Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan—which had been a part of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries. Like their fellow ethnics—the Italians, Greeks, Slavs and Jews—the early Arab immigrants were predominantly poor peasants who were already burdened with pre-voyage debts and family obligations, possessed few industrial skills and were unable to speak English.

As aliens in a foreign land, the odds against their survival were formidable.

Probably no one could have imagined in 1890 that in slightly less than 100 years, the Arab-American community would swell to 2.5 million. And only those who recognized the courage and fortitude of these indomitable immigrants would have predicted the degree of achievement and prosperity their children and grandchildren would enjoy.

We are their children and grandchildren. Today, we live in every region in the United States and work at every level of American professional, commercial and political life.

**W**E are the well-known  
and the unknown.

**We are  
Ralph Nader  
and Danny  
Thomas and  
Casey Kasem.**



**We are chefs  
and farm-  
workers,  
autoworkers**



Photo: Alan Dehmer

**and nurses,  
lawyers,  
engineers  
and  
doctors.**



**Top right, Danny  
Thomas; middle  
left, Raja  
Ramadan; middle  
right, Yemeni  
farmworkers in  
California; and  
bottom,  
Dr. Michael  
DeBakey.**

We are well-known and unknown. We are Ralph Nader and Danny Thomas and Casey Kasem. We are the farm workers of southern California, the auto workers of Detroit and the steelworkers of Pennsylvania. We are doctors and lawyers, businessmen and engineers, nurses and accountants. We are the Iraqi store owners of Detroit, the Palestinians of the Ramallah Club in Houston and the Alawi of New Castle. We are the Rhodes Scholar from Utica and the former senator from South Dakota.

We are Americans of Arab descent—patriotic, civic-minded and intensely proud of our ethnic heritage and culture. Though our life styles reflect the American mainstream, we enjoy the legacy of ageless traditions and cultural richness, which our grandparents would not surrender when they settled in the land of "golden opportunity." Yet, the early Arab immigrants, our grandparents and great-grandparents, remained singularly private about their ethnic pride.

### **Fear of Foreigners**

As the original immigrants settled into jobs and neighborhoods, they were not accepted easily by their American neighbors. Before 1890 and the arrival of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and the Middle East, the United States considered itself a homogenous society whose dominant culture was white, Anglo-Saxon protestant. During the three decades when immigration into the United States reached unprecedented volume, Americans were confronted on the job, in the shops and on the streets with people who spoke strange languages, practiced different and sometimes non-Christian religions and had customs and traditions dissimilar to their own.

For the Arabs, the sources of their pride in their heritage were the very factors alienating them from American society—the richness of the Arabic language that Americans could not speak or even pronounce, the Eastern liturgies of their churches that were so unlike American churches and the Arabic culture. For the Muslim immigrants, like

the Alawis of New Castle, religion made them a minority within a minority.

Yet, in small and large Arab communities, the early immigrants strove to preserve their heritage and identity—through their churches, their clubs, the Arabic press and particularly within their families through traditional Arab cooking, the rituals of birth, death and marriage and the celebration of holidays.

Between 1890 and 1920, the number of Arab immigrants increased to more than 250,000 and this continual influx of relatives and villagers from the Arab homeland was an important factor in the preservation of the community's culture and tradition.

After World War I came the restrictive, discriminatory legislation which reduced immigration to a trickle and accelerated the assimilation and Americanization that characterized the Arab-American community through the following three decades.

Even though the industrializing United States needed the cheap labor of the new immigrants, some Americans were

determined to preserve the homogeneity of American culture. The legislation enacted in the 1920s was a major victory for the advocates of homogeneity and a defeat for cultural pluralism.

The National Origins Act of 1924 restricted immigration to 2 percent of the foreign-born residing in the United States in 1890, and by 1927, to an absolute limit of 150,000 yearly. The immigrant knew, in the words of an American text, "he was a second class citizen who had to make his way in American society through the barriers of social prejudice."

Besides hastening the process of assimilation, the immigration legislation also separated family members from one another. Many Arabs who emigrated to the United States before 1924 considered themselves transients; they came here to earn money and intended to return eventually to the homeland. Many families sent one or two male members to the United States hoping they would become prosperous and eventually return. However, when the dream of returning clashed with their newfound prospects for



Arab immigrants encountered a babel of tongues and a variety of cultures when they arrived at Ellis Island. After their first meal (left), the immigrants left the Island and set out to find their fortunes—or at least survival—on the streets of their new country.

security, freedom and livelihood, many immigrants began bringing their remaining family to the United States instead.

### The Price of the Melting Pot

Gradually the Arab immigrants became assimilated and Americanized, but not without cost. Between 1920 and 1950, spoken Arabic and the Arabic press declined. Many of the Eastern-rite churches lost members of their congregations to the more socially acceptable Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. And, while Arab-Americans still chose to marry within the community, most of the third generation had little exposure to their heritage.

Then in the 1960s, the "melting pot" pattern that had characterized the early immigrant experience began to reverse itself. The political and economic upheaval in the Arab homeland in the 1950s and 1960s created a new wave of immigrants from Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen

and other countries. These later Arab immigrants were spared many of the pangs of acculturation that their predecessors experienced, since many were educated, bi-lingual and familiar with western customs and traditions. Moreover, the later immigrants tended to settle in towns and cities where members of their families or villages were already established, or where Arab-American communities already existed.

At the same time, these immigrants possessed a pride in their Arab identity that was nourished by decades of struggle for political independence, by a closer link to Islam and by their conscious pursuit of linguistic and cultural autonomy within the American mainstream. Many foreign students of diverse Arab nationalities came here to study, giving further stimulus to the survival of the Arab ethnic identity in this country.

The reawakening of an ethnic consciousness among Arab-Americans also can be linked to a trend common among immigrant groups. Second and third generations, fully assimilated, reach out to a heritage and a past to add depth to an otherwise rootless American identity. This process of "deassimilation" was stimulated by the Black Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, which affirmed the value of cultural pluralism and ethnicity in American society.



Khalil Atiyeh (above right) was not allowed to serve overseas during World War I because he was considered a subject of the Ottoman Empire. After the war, he and his brother opened a successful Oriental rug business in Portland (right).





## A Rebirth of Awareness

The "Arab Renaissance" that began in the 1960s also stems in part from the Arab-American community's increased awareness of the political and economic importance of U.S.-Arab relations.

Today, the Arab-American community has a population exceeding 2.5 million, which crisscrosses the nation and has centers in Detroit, Chicago, New York and Boston, as well as burgeoning communities in California, Texas and Ohio. It is a community that four generations ago survived by peddling dry goods, operating small stores and working in the textile and steel mills of the industrial Northeast, and which has now successfully entered the American mainstream.

Arab-Americans are proud of their heritage, but even if they were inclined to forget their past, American society wouldn't let them. Political and economic events in the Middle East have been portrayed in media images of greedy oil sheiks and bloodthirsty terrorists. At a time when the United States is more receptive to cultural pluralism and ethnicity is no longer socially unacceptable, Arab-Americans remain primary targets of defamatory attacks on their cultural and personal character.

Therefore, much of the activity of the Arab-American community has been directed at correcting the stereotypes that threaten to produce a new wave of anti-Arab racism in the United States and endanger the civil and human rights of the Arab-American community. The quiet pride of the original immigrants has become a shout.

Today's Arab-American is upwardly mobile and politically conscious. While Arab-Americans are profoundly loyal to American values and institutions, they are intensely proud of their heritage and determined to preserve and defend it.

ADC began in 1980 as a direct result of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's infamous "Operation Abscam," in which FBI agents trapped a number of Congressmen by posing as Lebanese "sheiks" offering bribes. ADC Chairman

James Abourezk said at the time, "Had the operation been called Jewscam, the outcry would have been incredible, and so it should."

At ADC's 1983 convention in Los Angeles, ADC Assistant Director Helen Samhan described ADC's reason for being: "Service is the core of ADC's work, and it is the challenge of ADC's organizers and leaders at a local as well as a national level to seek out the needs of our community, to find strategies that build a future for our communities. Some of ADC's current campaigns may respond to needs that we may never have thought we had. But they guarantee that ADC will be there when and if we do."

ADC Executive Director James Zogby described anti-discrimination work as "giving Arab-Americans power to become involved in their communities on every level, to determine foreign policy, to determine domestic policy as they wish. But to be involved on every level. That's what ADC is about. We use ADC to organize our people first and foremost for their own power."

ADC has become an advocate, providing immigrant assistance, protesting FBI harassment of Arab-Americans and calling for a Congressional investigation of the unfair treatment of Arab-Americans and Arab-Canadians at the U.S.-Canadian border. Recently the ADC national executive committee agreed to develop a legal guide and to begin a limited legal defense fund.

In three years, the list of ADC victories grows in its struggle to combat the negative stereotyping of Arab-Americans:

- The decision by Roget's *Thesaurus* to delete in its 1981 edition synonyms for the word Arab, such as "vagabond, hobo, tramp, vagrant, peddler, hawker, huckster, vendor."
- The removal from *Elements of Social Scientific Thinking* by Kenneth R. Hoover of a reference to Arabs creating a hypothetical parallel between the number of oil wells owned and the number of wives a sheik has.
- The withdrawal by firms in Florida, Ohio and Massachusetts of offensive products and publications including,

among others, a postcard that read.  
"Fight High Oil Prices! Mug a Sheik!"

### The New Assaults

Unlike the resistance early Arab immigrants met in this country, which stemmed from the determination of some Americans to preserve the homogeneity of American culture, the source of today's defamation of Arab-Americans might be described as the domestic counterpart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. And that is the attempt by the Israeli lobby and various Jewish organizations to shore up support for Israel by defaming Arab-Americans.

Photo: UPI



ADC's "Save Lebanon" program was initiated during the summer of 1982 at the request of doctors in Lebanon for aid to the wounded victims of war. Over 50 children, teenagers and young adults have been given medical treatment. Abir Solh (above) with her mother, arrived with the first group of wounded on Valentine's Day, 1983.

The intensity of these attacks peaked following Israel's invasion of Lebanon during the summer of 1982, when the Arab-American community emerged as an organized and vocal opponent of Israel's policies. ADC organized the "Save Lebanon" campaign to coordinate medical relief for the Lebanese and Palestinian victims of the war, and to counter Israel's propaganda depictions about the war.

ADC has undertaken to provide assistance to children in Lebanon who are orphaned or whose parents are missing or disabled, and has organized the "Save Lebanon" campaign, which has brought children from Lebanon to the United States for medical treatment.

In tandem with its work on behalf of the victims of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and against the negative stereotyping of Arab-Americans here in the United States, ADC is also working to enhance and preserve the Arab-American heritage. Two projects planned for this year are the Kahlil Gibran Centennial Celebration and a series of after-school seminars for Arab-American children so they can learn about their rich cultural heritage and deal with the sometimes hidden hurts of anti-Arab sentiments.

ADC's campaigns in the U.S.—whether they are to stop the defamation of Arab-Americans, to join other racial and ethnic groups to combat racism and bigotry in American society or to defend academic freedom—are all rooted in ADC's emphasis on human and civil rights. Following the war in Lebanon, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which lobbies Congress on behalf of Israel, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) both published books attacking Arab-American leaders and organizations as well as non-Arab-Americans who were critical of Israeli policies. The attacks characterized Israel's critics as "supporters of PLO terrorism" or as "tools of Arab petrodollars." The Arab-American community was described as "artificial" and un-American, since according to the ADL and AIPAC, support for Israel is "in the national interest."

ADC's Research Institute is preparing a comprehensive analysis of these attacks



which will document clear cut cases of defamation.

The importance of national organizations like ADC cannot be overestimated, since they represent a counterweight to the political clout and propaganda machinery of the Israeli lobby. In order to respond in a unified way to major events such as the war in Lebanon, the leaders of six national Arab-American organizations agreed in September 1983 to form the Council of Presidents of National Arab-American organizations. ADC's James Abourezk was elected the first chairman of the council.

### Reaching Out to Others

ADC's links to other ethnic and racial groups are essential to thwart ADL's attempts to isolate the Arab-American community. One theme of ADC's leadership conference last year was that the aim of ADC's anti-discrimination work was to empower the Arab-American community to change American attitudes.

"That's why we build coalitions," says an ADC spokesperson, "because you can organize all the Arab-Americans you want and get nowhere unless you bring those masses of numbers of people you organize together with other Americans and create a critical mass that can turn this country around."

ADC sought to establish ties to other ethnic and racial groups not only to end the isolation of Arab-Americans, but also because of its commitment to the elimination of racism, discrimination and bigotry from American society. Last summer, ADC chapter members from across the country participated in the march on Washington organized by the Coalition of Conscience for Jobs, Peace and Freedom to commemorate Martin Luther King's historic march in 1963. ADC's role in the coalition dates from its inception when one of the coalition leaders, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, invited Abourezk to be a co-convenor of the march.

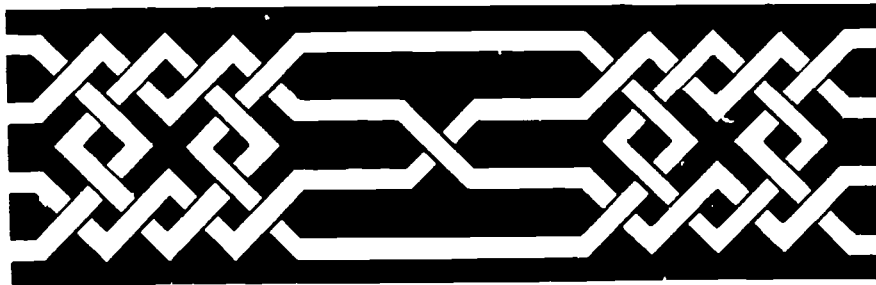
Arab-Americans' vigilance benefits the society as a whole. This was particularly true in the case of the "uncensored"

General Accounting Office report on U.S. military assistance to Israel, which shed a glaring light on how U.S. citizens' tax dollars are being spent. The report, released by ADC, cited State and Defense Department officials' opinions that the Israeli view of the Arab threat to its security was "over-emphasized at this time." Pentagon officials were described as reluctant to commit Foreign Military Sales funds to purchase armaments for Israel "because of the U.S. economic situation, unemployment and the potential precedent-setting impact on other countries' FMS requests." The report cited the political difficulties of reducing U.S. aid to Israel, however, because of strong Congressional support for Israel.

Last year, ADC kicked off its fall campaign with a tour of ADC chapters by Dr. Israel Shahak, an Israeli civil and human rights leader. A survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, Dr. Shahak has been a critic of Israeli policies, including the invasion of Lebanon and the treatment of Palestinians on the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

ADC supports Palestinian self-determination and the right to an independent homeland as fundamental human rights. When the civil war in Lebanon resumed after Israel's withdrawal from the Chouf mountains, ADC's Executive Director wrote an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* on September 15 in which he urged Arab-Americans to form a peace committee that would call on Lebanon's traditional elites to put aside their weapons and seek national dialogue and reconciliation.

ADC marks the progress of Arab-Americans from penury to prosperity and from a scattered, isolated minority to an organized force in American society and politics. ■



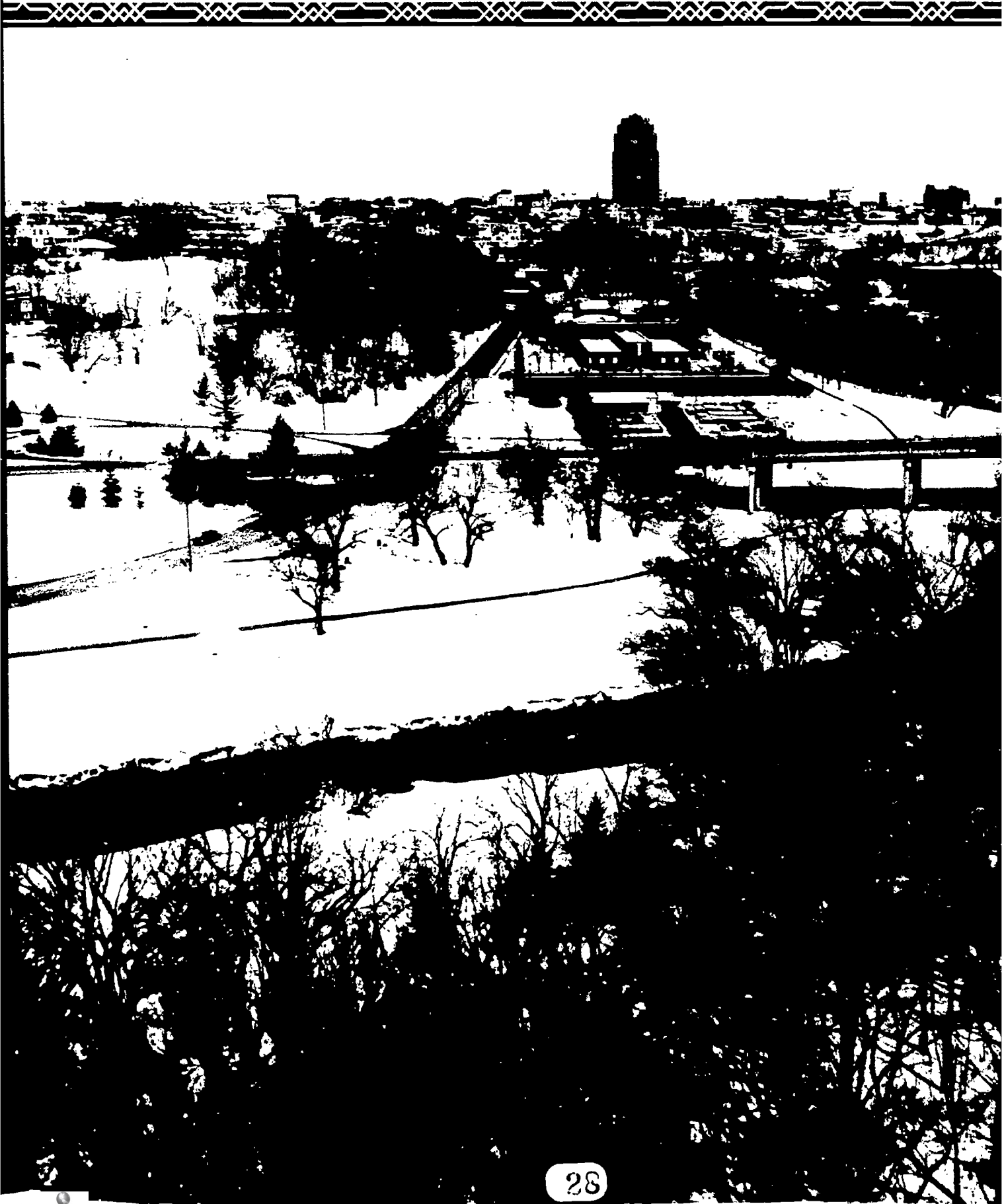
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# The Way We are: Our Communities

In this section,  
*ADC Reports* looks at the places we live. By  
examining 11 Arab-American communities—  
their history, their religion, their people—and  
by taking a closer look at Yemeni  
farmworkers in California and Muslims in  
America, a mosaic begins to take shape!  
This is the way we are.

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# Fertile Valley

by Mary Ann Fay

**S**UPER Sunday in Allentown happens in September. It's the day the city celebrates its ethnic diversity with a combination crafts fair and food bazaar.

Although the city is predominantly Pennsylvania German in population and character, it is also home to a variety of ethnic groups including Irish, Italians, Poles, Slavs, Arabs and, most recently, Hispanics. Each Super Sunday, the Hamilton Mall, the city's main shopping street, is closed to traffic. Men, women and children throughout the Lehigh Valley can eat their way from one culture to another, from pizza to potato pancakes and from *tabouleh* to funnel cake.

In front of the First National Bank opposite the Soldiers and Sailors Monument at 7th Street and Hamilton Mall, members of St. George's Eastern Orthodox Church had a food stand where they served *shish kebab*, *tabouleh*, *hummus* and other Middle Eastern delicacies. Midway through the afternoon, the crowds around the food stand could eat their *shish kebab* or sticky, sweet *baklava* to the music of an Arab band.

The presence of the city's Arab-Americans at Super Sunday is not unusual. The Arab-American community has participated in the city's ethnic festival since its inception. The food stand on Super Sunday is a symbol of the degree to which the Arab-American community has been woven into the city's social, cultural and political life.

## Faces of Allentown

**H**ARVEY Atiyeh came to the United States in 1926 at the age of 11 from the village of Amar in Syria. His father, George, was one of the first Syrian immigrants to settle in Allentown.

Recently retired, Atiyeh worked as a union organizer for the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

In Florida, Atiyeh cultivates his garden and is particularly proud of his fig tree. His friends jokingly tell him that he is still a Syrian peasant at heart, and Atiyeh laughingly agrees. Although he remains intensely interested in the affairs of the Arab-American community in Allentown and still receives the local newspaper so he can follow events there, Atiyeh



Photo: Joany Carlini-Cali-Chronicle Newspapers, Inc.

In Allentown, he helped to organize the UAW local at Mack Trucks and the city's municipal employees.

In 1968, Atiyeh was one of the founders of the Syrian Arab-American Cultural Society, now the Arab-American Cultural Society. In 1981, he organized the local chapter of ADC of which he is a national board member.

For the past two years, Atiyeh has divided his time between his home in Naples, Florida, and

believes that after decades of hard work and community service, he has earned his retirement.

As first generation Arab-Americans like Atiyeh have retired and become less involved in the Allentown community, others have stepped forward to take their places. One of those is **Ayoub Jarrouj**, president of the Arab-American Cultural Society and an ADC coordinator.

Allentown's Arab-American community's roots are deep. Aziz Elias Atiyeh, the first immigrant from the Syrian village of Amar came to Allentown in the 1890s. Since Atiyeh landed in Allentown and survived by peddling dry goods house to house in communities throughout the Lehigh Valley, the Arab-American community has grown to an estimated 5,000-7,000 people and has included among its ranks one of Lehigh County's most popular district attorneys, an assistant police chief, the president of one of the two teacher's unions in the city and the head of the city's public defender's office.

The tendency of the city's Arab-Americans to vote as a bloc and predominantly Democratic has given the community access to city government, particularly during a Democratic administration.

Ayoub Jarrouj, president of the Arab-American Cultural Society and an ADC coordinator, said, "The mayor recognizes that he has to deal with us as a political force."

The participation of the city's Arab-American community in Super Sunday 1982 was nothing out of the ordinary. However, because of an event that occurred the day before, the city, indeed the entire Lehigh Valley, learned an important lesson: To be an Arab-American means more than savoring Middle Eastern food and the seductive swaying of a belly dancer.

### Coming of Age

On the preceding Saturday, just two blocks away from their Super Sunday food stand, the city's Arab-Americans held their first public demonstration. Carrying Palestinian and American flags and placards denouncing Israel and Prime Minister Menachem Begin, an estimated 200 people marched through the streets of the city to demonstrate their revulsion and anger over the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

The demonstration began with a memorial service at St. George's Eastern

Orthodox Church and then, under a bright September sun, the demonstrators marched to the plaza in front of the county courthouse. Representatives of other religious, ethnic and racial groups participated with the city's Arab-Americans in the demonstration, including several Protestant ministers, the president of the local chapter of the NAACP and one of the leaders of the city's Hispanic community.

The demonstration after the Sabra and Shatila massacre represented the

heritage survived mainly within the family and in various cultural organizations.

## Ethnic Pride Revitalized

When new immigrants began to arrive in Allentown in the late 1950s, they brought with them a fervent Arab nationalism and still-fresh memories of their homeland. The result has been a re-awakening of the community's ethnic pride and a willingness to assert itself



**Allentown's Arab-Americans were joined by other local community groups to protest the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.**

Photo: Call-Chronical Newspapers, Inc.

coming of age of Allentown's Arab-Americans. On that day they demonstrated their willingness to assert not only their ethnic pride but their political views as well.

"The demonstration was a milestone," said Leila Jarrouj, an ADC board member and treasurer of the local chapter of the National Association of Arab Americans. "We came out of the closet."

The 1982 demonstration is an example of the effect the new immigrants—a second first-generation of Americans—has had on the Arab-American community in Allentown. As in other Arab-American communities in the country, the Arab

socially, culturally and politically.

According to Kamal Abboud, an ADC coordinator, about 65 percent of the Arab-American community is made up of immigrants who began to arrive in Allentown in the late 1950s, with the largest wave coming in the 1970s. In Allentown, there has been a cross-fertilization between the generations as the assimilated children of the original immigrants helped the new immigrants find jobs and housing and work their way through the process of naturalization. The new immigrants infused the community with their nationalism and their pride in their heritage.



## **Faces of Allentown,** *continued*

Jarrouj, who was born in Amar, Syria, came to the United States in 1965. During his presidency, the cultural society expanded its programs and purchased land for the construction of a new building designed to hold 400 people. Jarrouj hopes the new building will become a real community center since neither St. George's Church nor the society's present building are large enough for community events such as the society's annual dinner.

Jarrouj's wife, Leila, is also actively involved in the community. She is a member of the board of the local ADC chapter and treasurer of the local chapter of NAAA.

Leila came to the United States in 1961 from Trinidad. Both of her parents were born in

Ajoun, Syria. Although her parents intended to settle in the United States, they stopped off in Trinidad on the way, liked it and stayed.

Ayoub, who is employed at Bethlehem Steel, and Leila have two children, a son, 14, and a daughter, 17. On the ceiling of their son's bedroom is the flag carried at the head of the demonstration held in September 1982 in Allentown to protest the massacre of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

Both Ayoub and Leila believe that the Arab-American community must be organized and should be a force in the life of the city. Both are also determined to combat the negative, often defamatory, image of Arab-Americans.

"It was the image they portrayed of us and we sat back and let them do it to us," said Leila. "We want to show them we're as good as they are—even better." ■



**Ayoub Jarrouj leads a demonstration held in September 1982 protesting the Sabra and Shatila massacre. [The demonstration was held on the plaza in front of the county courthouse in Allentown.]**

## **Presbyterian Missionaries Bring Message of the West**

The Arab-American community began originally with the pioneer immigrant Aziz Elias Atiyeh and his brother, George. Together, they came to Allentown from the village of Amar, one of about 30 villages in Syria's Christian valley.

For centuries, the inaccessibility of the valley protected the villagers and allowed them to practice their religion in peace and safety. Then, sometime in the 1890s, this remote and tranquil valley was opened to the outside world by missionaries of the American Presbyterian Church. One of the missionaries, Dr. W.S. Nelson of Philadelphia, spent 60 years in Amar.

Some of the villagers gravitated to the mission, if not for religious reasons, then for the Western-style education the mission offered. Through contact with the missionaries, the villagers in Amar learned about the new way of life and the prosperity that lay across the ocean in the United States. A few of them, like Aziz and George, decided to seize the opportunity to create a new life for themselves and left the village.

Aziz Atiyeh settled in Allentown but his brother left and eventually settled in Portland, Oregon. To support himself, Aziz became a peddler, buying on credit in Allentown and selling his dry goods door to door in the small towns and villages outside the city.

In 1900, Aziz's cousin, who was also named George Atiyeh, followed him to Allentown and he, too, became a peddler. Sometime before World War I, cousin George became engaged and returned to Amar with his bride-to-be for the wedding. Although he wanted to return to the United States with his wife, he was unable to leave Syria because of the outbreak of World War I.

In the early 1920s, George left Amar alone and returned to the United States to work and save enough money to bring over his family which had grown to include two sons, and two daughters. In 1926, George's wife and four children boarded a ship for the journey to the United States.

One of the sons, Harvey, who was 11 years old at the time, remembers the



voyage. After leaving Beirut, the ship docked at Haifa and then, en route to Piraeus, the ship hit a reef where it was stranded for five days until another ship arrived to pick up the passengers.

After 39 days with stops at Istanbul, Rostov on the Black Sea, Malta, Naples, Marseilles and Barcelona, the ship arrived at Ellis Island in New York. Because of the sea-sickness that never abated during the voyage, Harvey Atiyeh never traveled by ship again.

In 1926, the Arab community in Allentown numbered about 60-70 families. The size of the community is fixed in Harvey Atiyeh's memory because the members of the community attended the funeral of his father who died only three months after his family arrived in Allentown from Syria.

### Allentown's Sixth Ward

When Harvey Atiyeh arrived in Allentown, many of the city's Arab and European immigrants lived in the city's 6th Ward, a neighborhood of small rowhouses along the Lehigh River that flows through the city. Although the children of the original Arab and European immigrants moved out of the neighborhood as they became more prosperous and socially mobile, the 6th Ward is still home to another generation of immigrants, the Arabs who began arriving in the late 1950s and the Hispanics.

Today, the 6th Ward has a distinctly Arab character with its Arab grocery stores, bakeries, coffee houses and the headquarters of the Arab-American Cultural Society.

According to Abboud, the majority of the Arab-American community is employed as blue collar workers in factories such as the Alton Knitting Mill and large industries like Bethlehem Steel, Mack Truck or Western Electric. The community also has a growing middle class of professionals and business owners, particularly among the second and third generations.

The center of the community's social and cultural life is St. George's Eastern

Orthodox Church and the Arab-American Cultural Society. The original church was built in 1916 and was later demolished so that a larger church could be built in its place in 1964.

The cultural society, originally called the Syrian Arab-American Cultural Society, was founded in 1968 as a community center and as an organization that could assist the new immigrants in the city. Last year, the organization received a city grant to operate a summer program in English and math for city school children and an outreach program for the Arab community that includes employment counseling, assistance in finding housing, translation and transportation for those who can't drive. In addition, the society has been distributing food supplied by a private organization to needy Arab-American families, many of whom lost jobs in industry during the 1983 recession. Jarrouj explained, "Some of our people are too proud to apply for welfare or food stamps."

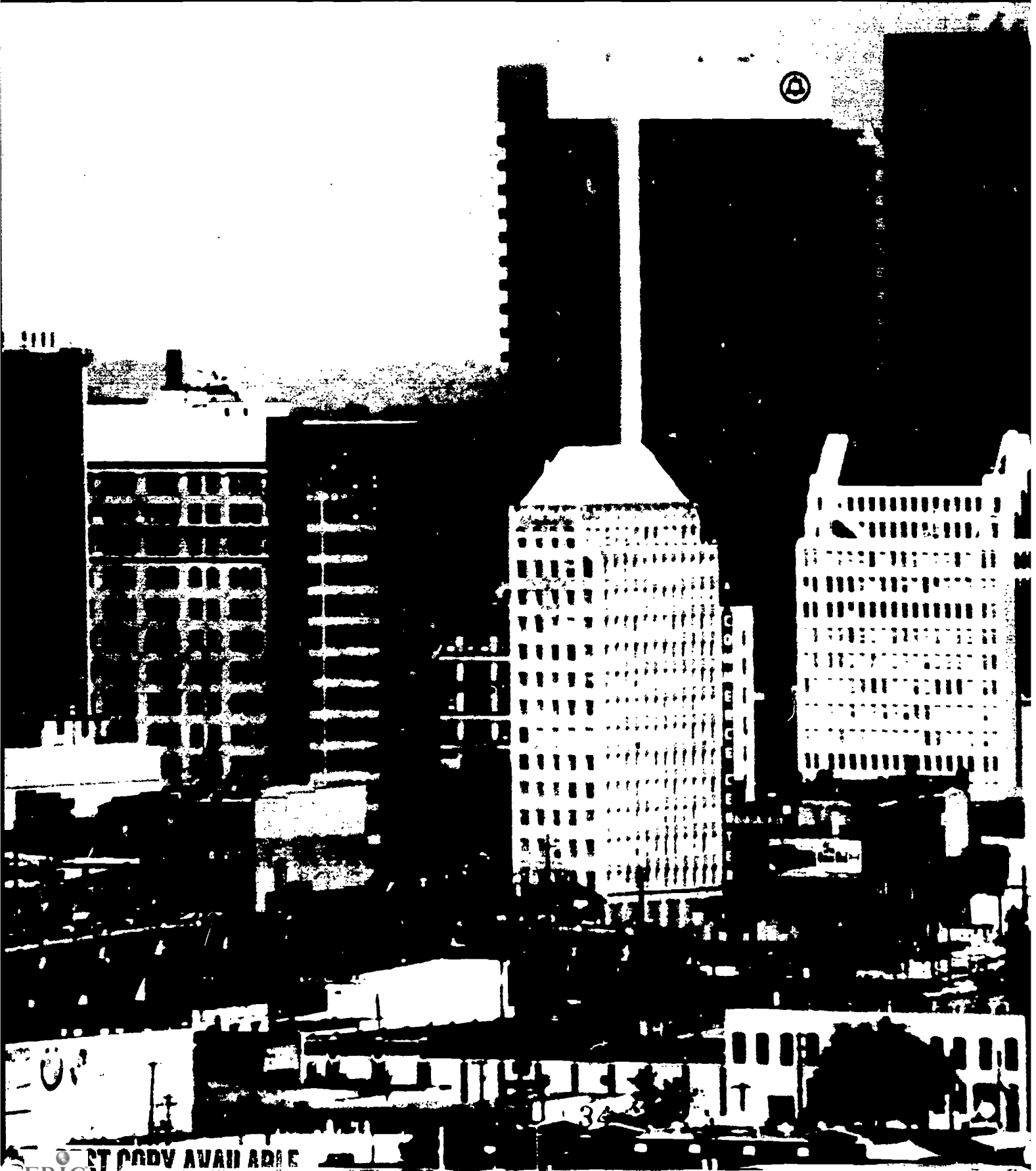
The society also conducts Arabic language classes for adults and children. Recently, the society purchased land for a new center that Jarrouj hopes will be completed this year.

Each year, the society celebrates Syrian Independence Day with a banquet and the raising of the Syrian flag at City Hall. About 80 percent of the Arab-American community is Syrian in origin, about 17 percent is Lebanese and 3 percent is Palestinian.

The city's ADC chapter was organized in 1981 by Atiyeh and recently the NAAA founded a local chapter as well.

That the city's Arab-American community has become more politically conscious, better organized and more assertive is reflected in the local media. Once particularly ignored, the Arab-American community and its events are now regularly covered by the local media. During the war in Lebanon in 1982, Arab-American community leaders routinely were sought out for their opinions and knowledge of events in Lebanon.

"It is important to be organized," said Jarrouj. "To stay asleep while others are doing their work means they would get stronger while we get weaker." ■



# The Politics of Survival

by Alan Dehmer

**W**HEN Josephine Sharbel's parents, Sultana and Khattar, arrived in Birmingham, Alabama in the early years of the 20th century, they entered one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Thousands of immigrants from around the country and the world poured into Birmingham between 1880 and 1930. They were looking for new work opportunities in, or around the growing steel industry. Today they are part of a growing Arab-American community made up of first-, second- and third-generation Lebanese and Palestinian-Americans who number over 400 families combined.

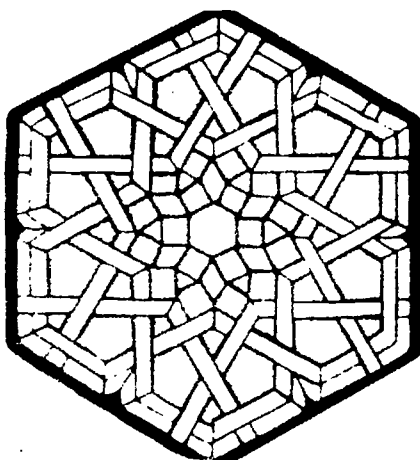
Sultana and Khattar were from the same village in Lebanon (then Syria), but it was not until after they arrived in the United States that Khattar "twisted" Sultana's arm and they married. Sultana, 17 years older than Khattar, had actually come to the United States with her sister and brother before Khattar. She went to Paris, Texas where relatives had already settled. Khattar, who was educated as a teacher in Lebanon, came to America shortly after Sultana. He took up peddling, carrying his wares on his back and traveling from city to city in search of business and a place to call home. He too stopped in Paris, Texas where he found Sultana.

"Mama used to say she never was sure what it was about him—but he was a very good-looking man, and she said, 'Well, I want a child, so . . . he's well-

## Faces of Birmingham

**W**HEN Salem Shunnarah settled in Birmingham in 1940, he became the first Palestinian resident of this southern city. After arriving in the United States in 1935, Shunnarah traveled throughout the south as a peddler, selling tapestries, oriental rugs and the like. In 1940, in Augusta, Georgia, he met the woman who would become his wife. She was a Lebanese-American from Birmingham who, he claims, is "really a Palestinian at heart."

Mr. Shunnarah continued peddling for a few years, then settled in Birmingham. There he opened an oriental rug store which he still operates with one of his sons.



In 1948, relatives began moving to Birmingham from Ramallah. In 1949 they formed the Ramallah Club and Mr. Shunnarah became its first president. He also served as president of the American Ramallah Federation in 1968-69.

Since he arrived in America, Mr. Shunnarah 34 has returned to the land of

his birth several times to visit family still living there. "I like the country a lot," he said. "I might go in June."

**Fred Melof** worked as a safety engineer for U.S. Steel in Birmingham for 45 years, until his retirement in 1972. The Melof family immigrated to the United States when Fred was five years old. His father owned a grocery in Birmingham, but Fred, his two brothers and a sister all worked for the steel industry. "My family had more people working for U.S. Steel than anyone in the area," boasted Melof. Known by fellow Arab-Americans as the community's historian, Melof continues to work as a consultant for the steel industry.

**Dr. Salah El-Dareer** is one of about 15 Egyptian-born residents of Birmingham, and one of a handful of Muslims there. He did his early studies in Cairo before coming to the United States to study pharmacology at Michigan State University and the University of Michigan. Dr. El-Dareer and his wife moved to Birmingham in 1965 where he has since been engaged in cancer research at Southern Research Institute.

Though there is no mosque in Birmingham, El-Dareer has maintained his Muslim faith, and at one time served as Imam for the local community. On occasion he and other Arab Muslims also worship at the Black Muslim mosque in Birmingham. ■

educated, and he's good-looking, and he has a beautiful voice, so if I have a child and he leaves me . . . Well he never left her. He never did," recalls Josephine.

For however many reasons, Sultana, 34, and Khattar, 17, married and set off for new frontiers again—this time together. After short stays in Kentucky and Nashville, Tennessee, they arrived in Birmingham. In 1904, they gave birth to Josephine, making her Birmingham's first Lebanese-American. "I was the first Lebanese child born in Birmingham," and I was delivered by the first Lebanese doctor in Birmingham" boasts Josephine. "Dr. El-Kourie used to always brag about me for that."

Like Khattar and Sultana, Birmingham's Lebanese—all of whom were either Maronite or Melkite Catholics—emigrated from the rich farmland around Zahle. Most had come from the village of Wadi-el-Arayeche, one or two family members at a time. They would come over, earn money and soon invite other members of the family to their new home. In this way, the community grew rapidly between 1900 and 1920. In 1905, the men formed the Phoenician Club, which still exists today as the Cedars Club. In 1910, a Maronite Church was established and named St. Elias, after the Maronite church in Wadi-el-Arayeche. St. Elias Church was founded in a converted public school building at 20th Street and Sixth Avenue South, in what is now downtown Birmingham and which at the time was an area of Lebanese settlement in the city. In 1915, the Lebanese community of Birmingham was 65 families strong. St. George Melkite Church was established in 1921, giving Birmingham two distinct Eastern Catholic Churches in which to worship.

### Peddlers to Store Owners

Then as now, the Lebanese community represented only a small portion of Birmingham residents. But from the start, it played an important role in the evolution of the city's economy and social organization. Starting as peddlers in

the streets of Birmingham and throughout the countryside, most Lebanese were able to set up small retail stores within a few years of arrival. Dry goods and grocery stores were most common, but there were other successful ventures as well. Sultana, for example, opened up a fine linen shop, selling cloth unavailable elsewhere in Birmingham. Josephine recalls writing orders to the New York distributor Dahrouh Elian as a young girl. Although her mother had learned to speak English, she was unable to write it. "I probably misspelled everything, but we always got everything just the same," she said. "We got the stuff here all right."

Josephine's role as family translator was a familiar one for children of Lebanese and other immigrant families. Growing up in America put the children in the position of bridging two worlds. This had its advantages, but parents were concerned that the new generation might lose sight of their heritage. In response, Khattar began teaching classes in 1915 in Arabic and Arabic literature, music and history. Classes were held in the afternoons, first at St. Elias Church and later at St. George's as well. Khattar's

classes served to keep alive in the new generation the strong sense of Lebanese identity that persists to this day in Birmingham.

Such passing down of traditions and language was commonplace in early immigrant families in the United States. But in Birmingham it was not just the desire to pass on the best in the parents' cultural experience which brought Khattar to St. Elias Church after work. In Birmingham, cultural pride was necessary for survival in what was frequently a hostile environment.

White (Anglo-Saxon) southerners, the original settlers of Birmingham, were establishing racist policies and promulgating racist attitudes directed at the Lebanese and other Mediterranean and Eastern European settlers. From immigration policies which discouraged certain immigrants from further settlement into Alabama, to name-calling and exclusion from restaurants and other public facilities, Birmingham's Lebanese-Americans experienced bigotry and racism from their "white" neighbors. For the immigrant Lebanese, living in America meant having to defend and protect their civil and human rights.

**Although from the same village in Lebanon, it was not until after they met in Paris, Texas, that Sultana and Khattar heard wedding bells. After they moved to Birmingham, they gave birth to Josephine, the first Lebanese child born in that city. At left, Josephine Sharbel is playing the Lebanese national anthem in her house.**



Photos: Brenda McCallum for the American Folk Life Center Library of Congress

## Immigration & Racism

## An Era of Racism and Depression

Named after the English industrial city, Birmingham was established in 1871. Lying in the heart of a fabulously rich mineral region, a group of speculators and industrialists rallied that year to turn what had been cornfields into what would become, within the next 50 years, the South's most industrial city. So successful was the Birmingham project that after just a few short years, the supply of incoming workers from the surrounding region had been exhausted. The call went out to northern cities and to Europe for laborers, merchants and others. And they came—Russians, Hungarians, Greeks, German and Eastern European Jews, Italians, Irish, Germans, Slavic peoples and Lebanese. Between 1880 and 1930, the population of Birmingham and the surrounding suburban region increased from 4,000 to 260,000.

But it seems the Southern and Eastern Europeans who toiled in the city's industry and the Mediterranean immigrants who came to own many of the city's shops were not the immigrants that the white ruling class had in mind.

The key issue for white society in Birmingham's years of rapid expansion was how to facilitate economic growth—drawing on labor that would accept long hours, low pay and unfamiliar as well as unpleasant working and living conditions—while at the same time, maintaining the color line. The percentage of blacks living in Birmingham at this time was kept stable (approximately 40 percent), while comprising between 65 percent and 75 percent of the actual work force.

But the newer immigrants to the city, perceived as "colored" (the Lebanese were considered part of the "yellow race"), complicated this maintenance of the color line. The great influx of Mediterranean and Eastern European immigrants sparked an era of racist immigration policies in Alabama, the South and finally the United States. Birmingham's own representative to the U.S. Congress, Oscar W. Underwood, raised the immigration question in the House in 1905, lecturing his colleagues on the dangers of allowing

60TH CONGRESS,  
1st Session

**H. R. 9177.**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

DECEMBER 16, 1907.

Mr. BURNETT introduced the following bill, which was referred to the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization and ordered to be printed

### A BILL

To further regulate the exclusion of undesirable aliens from admission into the United States.

- 1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
- 2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled*
- 3 That after sixty days from the approval of this Act in addi-
- 4 tion to the aliens who are by law now excluded from admis-
- 5 sion into the United States the following persons shall also
- 6 be excluded from admission thereto, to wit: All aliens over
- 7 seventeen years of age who are physically capable of reading
- 8 and can not read the English language or the language of
- 9 some other country; all aliens of poor physique, and imbe-
- 10 ciles, except such as are under ten years of age and are ac-
- 11 companied by their father or mother, or whose father or
- 12 mother is already a resident of the United States at the date
- 13 of the approval of this Act; and all male aliens over eighteen
- 14 years who do not possess in their own right at least thirty

**In 1907, Rep. John Burnett introduced a bill into the Congress that sought to exclude Asian, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern peoples by way of requiring an English literacy test as a prerequisite for entry into this country. After a "fact-finding" mission through all of Europe and the Mediterranean, Burnett reported back to the Congress his findings: "God made only the Caucasian to rule this country; and I, for one, look with apprehension upon any effort to introduce . . . those thru whose veins flow the blood of any other than the Caucasian race."**



those without pure white blood in their veins to enter the United States.

While the fight went on in Washington, Alabama state representatives in 1907 were busy enacting their own immigration laws: "Immigrants shall be sought," one section stated, "from desirable white citizens of the United States first, and then citizens of English-speaking and Germanic countries, France, and the Scandinavian countries, and Belgium as prospective citizens of this state . . .".

In 1907, a bill in Washington was reported to the House by Alabama Rep. John Burnett, a member of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization. The bill called for prospective immigrants to pass a literacy test before being admitted to the United States. T.J. Brooks, representing the Farmer's Educational and Cooperative Union (FECU) which claimed over 1.5 million members in the Southern states alone, and 3 million nationwide, spoke for the bill. In 1909, FECU had passed a resolution at its national meeting in Birmingham to limit immigration by encouraging a literacy test and other preventatives. "Certain countries," said Brooks, "furnish a much greater percentage of undesirables than others." He was quick to list them: "The Sicilian, the Southern Italians, the Greek, the Syrian, and some from that belt of Africa and Asia surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, and farther east, including all Mongolians and Hindus."

In the same hearings, Dr. H.A. El-Kourie—the same Dr. El-Kourie that had delivered Josephine Sharbel—spoke against the bill. El-Kourie had become involved in the conflict as early as 1907 after Alabama's Congressman Burnett announced upon returning from an immigration fact-finding mission in Europe, "I regard the Syrian and peoples from other parts of Asia Minor as the most undesirable."

In defense of his people, El-Kourie wrote two letters to local newspapers defending the Syrian-Lebanese (who at the time were considered Syrians). Later, he wrote a short essay entitled "Facts Establishing That the Semitic is the Equal

of Any Race and Superior to Many." The writings detail the positive attributes of the Syrian immigrants and the positive role the Semitic race and its descendants—"the Syrians, Hebrews, German Jews, Russian Jews, Bedouins and Sedentary Arabs"—had played in history.

El-Kourie was "A born orator," says Fred Melof, a local historian and retired safety engineer for U.S. Steel. "He loved his people. And everybody worshipped him." But El-Kourie's arguments were drowned in the maelstrom of racist activities throughout the country.



To be Syrian and Catholic was to be twice removed from Birmingham's white Protestant ruling class. St. Elias Maronite Church (below) and St. George Melkite Church provided Birmingham's ostracized Lebanese-Americans a place of worship and unity during the turbulent years. Elizabeth Boohaker grew up in Birmingham in those years and later became secretary for St. Elias Church.

Photos: Brenda McCallum for the American Folk Life Center, Library of Congress



## Terror and the Klan

**Birmingham's steel brought workers from around the world to the southern city. From 1880 to 1930, Birmingham was one of the fastest growing, most ethnically diverse cities in the country.**

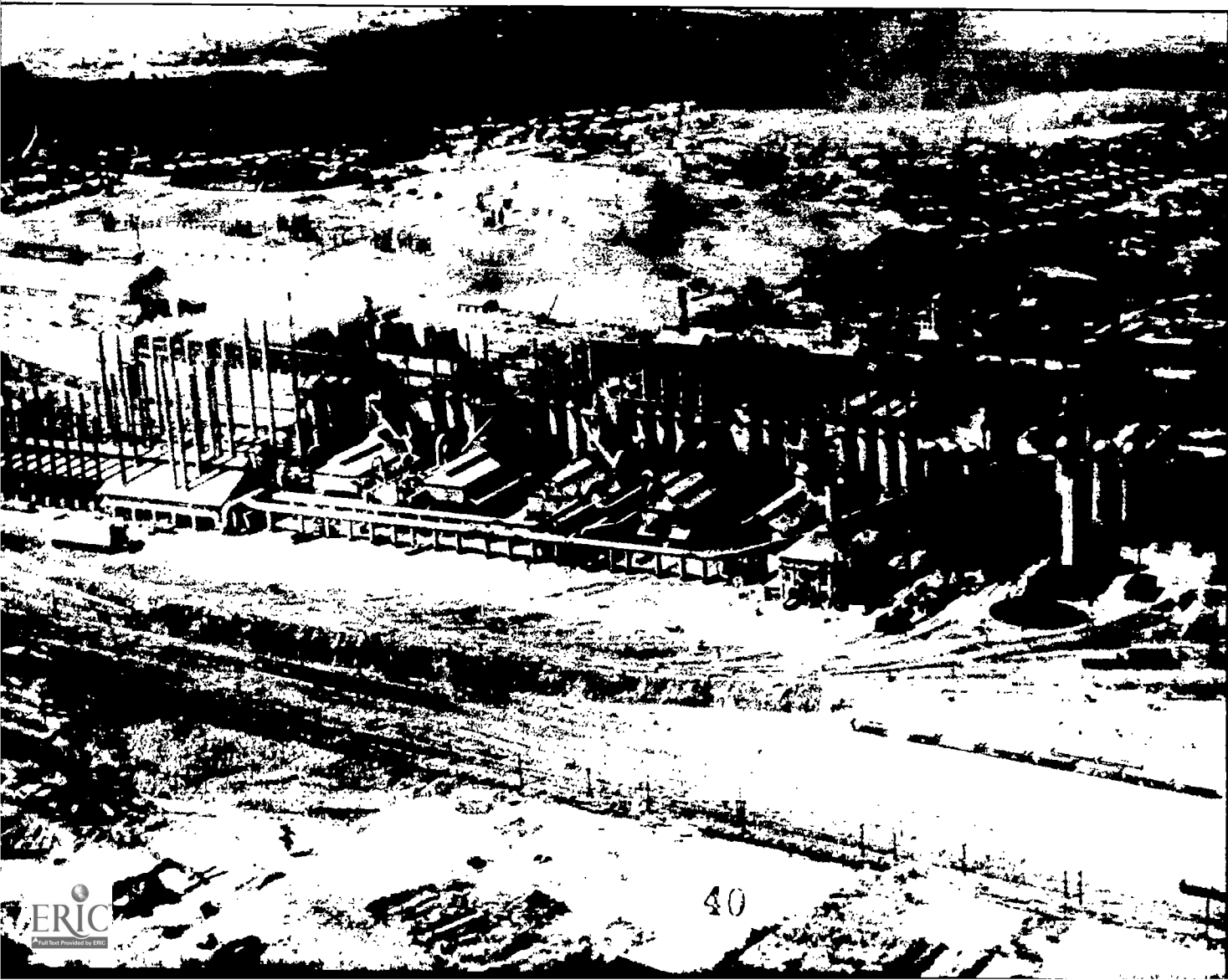
Photo: Birmingham Public Library

By 1924, U.S. legislation was passed that effectively restricted immigration to a slow trickle. The Ku Klux Klan and Christian fundamentalism ruled the day throughout the South, with Birmingham reputedly housing the largest Klavern in the country. A single Klan group in the city boasted 10,000 members! Perhaps another 10,000 residents of Birmingham (out of a population of less than 220,000) belonged to other, rival KKK-Klaverns.

The base of attack against Birmingham's Lebanese was not only directed at their birthplace or heritage. "The city at that time discriminated against Catholics, against ethnic groups-- against anything," reports Elizabeth Boohaker, who at the time "was just a little girl." The Roman rite Catholic bishop at the time encouraged Catholics in the

state to be courageous and bold in their beliefs, displaying their faith through outdoor processions and the like. But such displays had their price. "See," one Lebanese-American responded, "people here were even afraid to say they were Catholic at one time. Down South, you know, that is Baptist country. If you said you were Catholic, you got it."

The Lebanese Catholics were not the only endangered group. A member of Birmingham's Jewish community who lived through those days wrote, "Most Jews were horrified, but they felt helpless in the face of the Klan whippings, floggings and kidnappings that were commonplace." Those Klan members, he wrote, also harbored a psychopathic concern for "drinkers, Negroes, friends of Negroes, Catholics, friends of Catholics, immigrants, Sunday movies, divorce, and non-conformity in general."





Anti-Catholic and anti-"colored" feelings put the Lebanese, as shop owners catering to both blacks and whites, in an awkward position. Not only were they rejected by whites as the "yellow race" (they were even called "dagos" by some), but their faith also set them apart from the blacks. Philip K. Hitti's *The Syrians in America* quotes the text of a handbill that circulated during a 1920 political campaign. The handbill trumpeted, "For Coroner, Vote for J.D. Goss," "The White Man's Candidate." It went on, "They have disqualified the negro, an American citizen, from voting in the white primary. The Greek and Syrian should also be disqualified. I DON'T WANT THEIR VOTES. If I can't be elected by white men, I don't want the office."

The 1920s and 1930s saw the greatest degree of racism directed against the Lebanese. Although the problem remained until after World War II, by the 1930s, an additional problem faced the Lebanese shop owners as well as the rest of Birmingham and the United States—the Great Depression. At one point, Birmingham became known as the hardest hit city in the nation. Thousands of steel workers were laid-off. Elizabeth Boohaker's father owned a grocery store at the time.

"My father used to only take in \$2 or \$3 a day," she recalls, "That was in comparison with \$50 or \$60 a day before the Depression. . . . He'd give the (laid-off) workers food on time so that made it even harder . . . but he kept them alive. Along with us."

Only a few of the shop owners closed down their businesses though. Josephine Sharbel and her husband (a travelling salesman) were one of those exceptions. They moved to Georgia for two years and then returned after the worst of times were over.

### The Palestinian Family

As the Depression days were ending and life in Birmingham returned to "normal," a new group of immigrants began trickling in—Palestinians. Initially, they came to the United States to support their families back home. "At first just

some brothers and first cousins came," remarked one second-generation Palestinian-American. "They used to go around selling, you know, and they came on Birmingham and they liked it. So they stayed." Soon they, like the Lebanese before them, brought their families over. By the early 1960s, the Palestinian community numbered almost 150 people. But the political problems of the past 20 years have driven many more Palestinians from their homes. Today, the Palestinian community of Birmingham, mostly Melkites by faith and store owners by profession, numbers around 300 members.

Almost without exception the entire community is related and from Ramallah. "It's just a family here," remarks Nadin Rumanah, who operates a Middle East imports grocery store with his brother Nabeel. The store was formerly owned by Josephine Sharbel's husband. Today it serves both the Lebanese and Palestinians of Birmingham with Middle Eastern culinary items.

Relations between the two groups are not always close but remain friendly, through the art of Southern diplomacy as adopted by Lebanese and Palestinian-American alike in Birmingham.

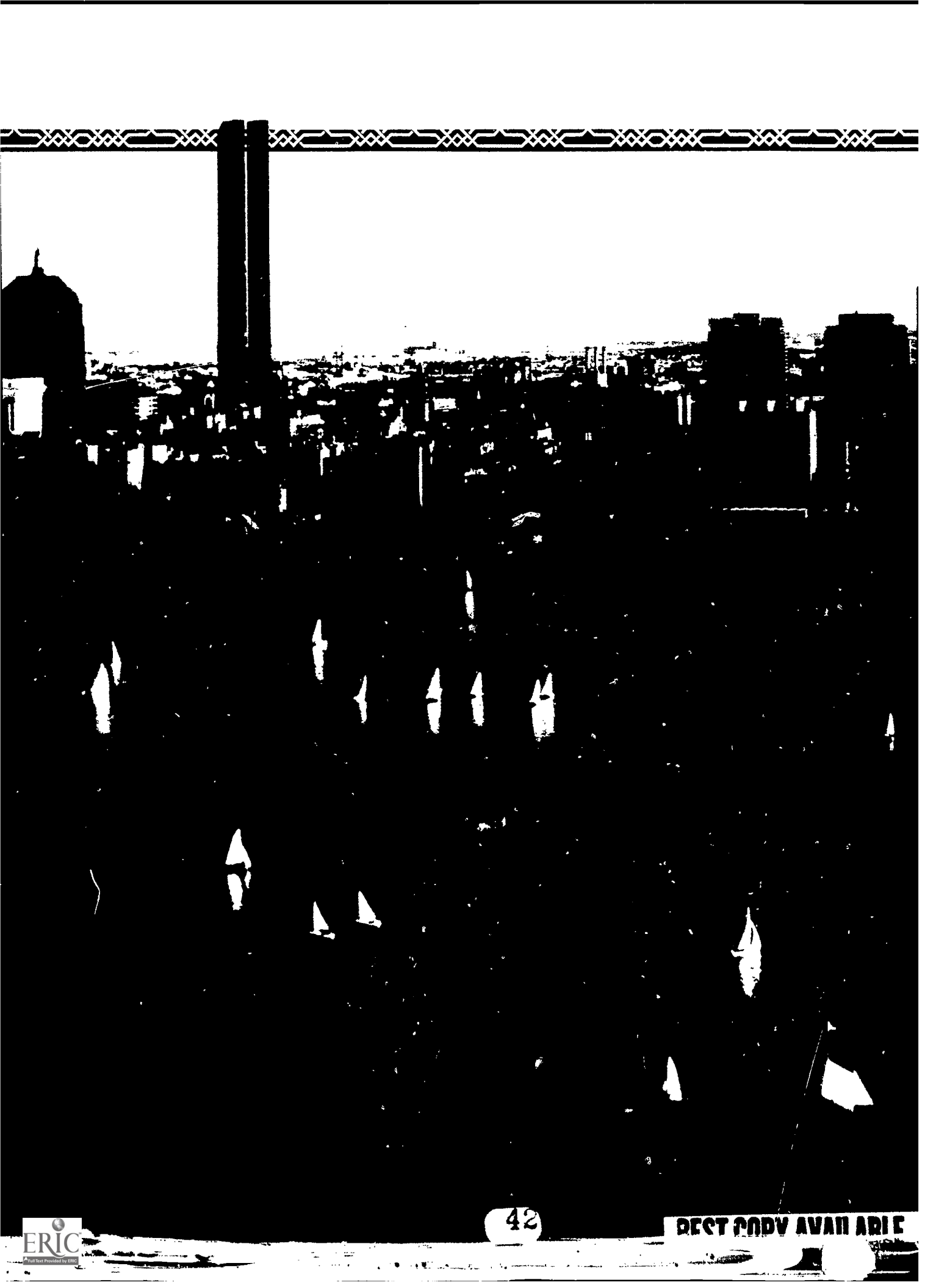
As elsewhere in the South where Arab-Americans have settled, Birmingham's Arab-American community has done so under the pressure of being perceived as different. In response, the overwhelming tendency is to keep a low profile, mind your own business and stay close to your family. Even the politics of the Middle East are put into the background for the sake of survival.

"We don't get involved in politics here," said one member of the Birmingham Arab-American community. "Everybody gets along. It's a family place. People got to work at 7, get off at 6 (or) 7 o'clock in the evening, they go home, they take care of their families and they get together sometimes and drink coffee, and . . . It's just a family here." ■

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Information concerning Lebanese immigration to Birmingham was provided by Nancy Faires Conklin and Nora Faires in a paper entitled "Colored" and Catholic: The Lebanese Community in Birmingham, Alabama."

The paper was presented at the first Philip K. Hitti International Symposium on Near Eastern American Studies held June 3-4, 1983.



# Dream of a Good Land

by Evelyn Shakir

**I**N 1630, while still on board the good ship *Arabella*, John Winthrop reminded his fellow Puritans that the colony they were about to establish would be "as a city upon a hill," he said. "The eyes of all people are upon us."

Two hundred and fifty years later, in the development Winthrop could have neither foreseen nor desired, Middle Eastern peasants began making their way to that city on the hill. Like later immigrants to Boston, these "Syrians" did not always share the intense sense of mission that had driven the Puritans to Massachusetts, but they did share the dream of "a good land" where despite hardships, homesickness and hostility, they might prosper and be happy.

In 1910, when Middle Eastern immigration to America was at its height, more Syrians and Lebanese lived in Boston than in any other city in the country, save New York. Most of them came from Mount Lebanon—the earliest contingents were from Beshari and Zahle—but many, too, came from Damascus. The best known of their number was Kahlil Gibran, who emigrated to Boston at the age of twelve and who, throughout his life, maintained close ties with the Boston community.

In Gibran's day, that community was centered in Boston's South Cove—a small area which is the site of present-day Chinatown. In this neighborhood of narrow, tenement-lined streets, coffee

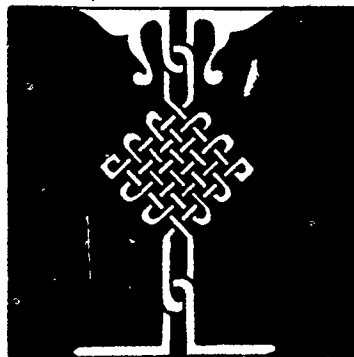
## Faces of Boston

**A** Palestinian who grew up in Lebanon, **Fateh Azzam** came to America with his family in 1966 when he was 16. Today he works for Oxfam America and attends the University of Massachusetts where he is working toward a degree in community planning. He also leads the Al Watan Contemporary Music Ensemble, which features "progressive and politically conscious" music from Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt. "We don't play belly-dancing music," said Fateh, "we play music that expresses the human situation in the Middle East right now."

**Kahlil Gibran**, cousin and namesake of the poet, is a sculptor of distinguished reputation who grew up in the South Cove, site of Boston's earliest Syrian-Lebanese settlement. "My earliest images," he said, "are of a tightly knit community which was very calming and secure and protective." But survival was a struggle, he added, so everyone worked. Even he and his brother, when still small children, used to go into the garment district on Saturday morning looking for discarded crates, then chop them up, pile the wood in their toy wagons and take it home to fuel the kitchen stove.

**Evelyn Abdalah Menconi**, the daughter of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, holds a Ph.D. in education and was long a teacher and then a

communications consultant in the Boston public schools. Several years ago, she helped found the William G. Abdalah Memorial Library in memory of her brother, which provides information on the Arab world and the Arab-American experience to teachers, parents, and librarians in the Boston area. "A good self-image helps a child to do his best," says Evelyn. "That's been one problem in the schools—we haven't given children a pride in their own ethnicity."



**Hannah Sabbagh Shakir** emigrated from Mount Lebanon in 1907 at the age of 12. Two years later she began working 12 hour days in a textile mill; later she became a stitcher, and later still started her own successful sewing factory. Since 1917, she has been an active member of the Syrian Ladies' Aid Society. "Once the club put on *Madame X*," she recalled, "and we put on Russian plays, too. In one I played a man and shot a gun. The women used to take all the male parts; we were too shy in those days to act with men."

shops dotted each block, and bakeries with wood-burning stoves turned out stacks of "Syrian" bread. In the cold-water flats, women in kerchiefs and voluminous aprons pounded meat in one bowl, garlic and salt in another. Outside, old men on orange crates played backgammon and smoked water pipes while dark-eyed children raced through the streets and Eastern music whined from a Victrola. But despite the familiar sounds and smells, "Little Syria" was not home. One woman who emigrated to Boston in 1912, with a husband she had known only three months, recalls that she was terrified of the noise and dirt of the city streets and so lonely that for the first year, she wrote her mother a letter every day.

Homesick or not, the first order of business for most immigrants was to find work. At the turn of the century, when the New England textile industry was still flourishing, the mill towns of eastern Massachusetts—Fall River, New Bedford, Lawrence and Lowell—relied heavily on immigrant labor. Syrians and Lebanese helped man the looms and sometimes became involved in the angry labor disputes that punctuated efforts to unionize mill hands. In Lawrence, just 30 miles north of Boston, the Syrian-Lebanese helped lead the famous Bread and Roses strike of 1912.

### Factories and Coffee Houses

Syrian-Lebanese men and women often worked as stitchers, cutters, or pressers; eventually, as they invested in factories of their own they came to share with the Jews a near monopoly of the city's needle industry. Many Syrian-Lebanese avoided factory work altogether, choosing instead to open neighborhood groceries, confectionary shops, bakeries, coffee houses, and dry goods stores. But in Boston, as in the rest of Massachusetts and, indeed, throughout most of the country, almost all of the immigrants who came before 1900 (and many who came after) were peddlers, at first of notions, dry goods, and religious objects, later (if they were successful) of expensive lingerie and linens.

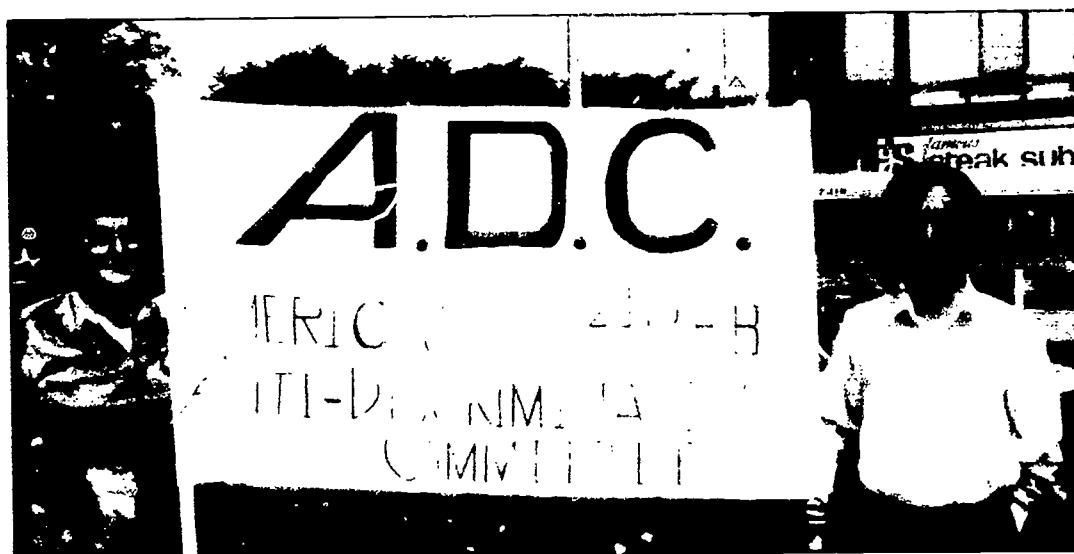
But peddlers aroused suspicion and

irritation in the city's predominantly Anglo establishment. In its 1899 report on Syrian-Lebanese, the Associated Charities of Boston saw little distinction between peddling and begging and complained that Syrian-Lebanese "always find an excuse for refusing work, even when offered them, as long as they can earn more by peddling." The fact is that to the descendents of the Puritans, the Syrian-Lebanese seemed incorrigibly alien.

"Next to the Chinese, who can never be in any real sense Americans," one Boston social worker wrote in 1898, "the Syrians are the most foreign of all our foreigners. Whether on the street in their Oriental costumes, or in their rooms

neighborhood, was a good neighbor indeed, providing clubs, classes, and companionship, especially to women and children. And the community itself soon spawned its own churches as well as a spate of social and cultural organizations that helped cushion the impact of new ways on old.

The best known of these clubs, no doubt because of Gibran's association with it, was the Golden Links, a group of men better educated than most of the community, who met to discuss books and ideas and to share their own writings. By the late 1920s, if not before, the Syrian Press of Boston (later the New Deal Press) was publishing works by immigrant



The Boston Arab-American community was well represented at the Jobs, Peace and Freedom March in Washington, D.C. on August 27, 1983. Seen here carrying the ADC banner are Evelyn Menconi (see Faces, opposite page) and Mushtague Mirza.

gathered around the Turkish pipe, they are always apart from us . . . and out of all the nationalities would be distinguished for nothing whatever excepting as curiosities."

Such sentiments are less surprising when one recalls that it was in Boston that the Immigration Restriction League was born in 1894, and that its forces were led by Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge.

### Clubs, Churches and Charities

Fortunately, other institutions in the city were more humane. Denison House, a settlement house staffed by women from local colleges and situated in the heart of the Arab immigrant

workers. Over the years, the community also supported several newspapers and journals including, among others, *Suria el Jedeeda* (published as early as 1910), *El Falut Boston*, and *Al Rasul*.

These literary and journalistic ventures were male-dominated. But the women in the community had their own causes to pursue. In about 1917, they began organizing to send humanitarian aid to people in the old country and to provide charitable services to the immigrants and their children in the Boston area. The dinners, plays, outings, and *haffis* the women sponsored contributed in a major way to the social life of the neighborhood and helped promote cohesiveness. One such club, the Syrian Ladies' Aid Society, owned an

elegant South End townhouse at 44 West Newton Street, which for 30 years was the central meeting place for all groups within the community. It was there in 1931 that Gibran was waked, and it was there, a year later, that leaders met to organize the Syrian American Federation of New England, the country's first regional alliance of Arab clubs and a forerunner of the National Federation, established in 1950.

Meanwhile, as the community grew and prospered, it was shifting its center,



first to the Shawmut Avenue area (where a remnant of Syrian-Lebanese remain) and then to West Roxbury, a street car suburb, which is best known as the site of the Brook Farm, the experiment in communal living made over a hundred years ago by the New England transcendentalists. One woman, Gladys Shibley Sadd, who was a child when her family moved from the South Cove to West Roxbury, remembers the suburb as a rustic paradise. "The wide open spaces were our playground," she says. "We picked berries in the woods behind the house, we gathered wild flowers, we climbed the trees, waded in the nearby brook and skated on the pond in winter." Though many Arab-Americans still live in West Roxbury, which is less rural than it used to be, the last decade or two have seen a further dispersal of the community into Norwood, Westwood, and other towns to the southwest of the city.

Slowly and sometimes reluctantly, the churches have followed the people. In the last decade or two, St. George's Orthodox Church and the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Annunciation (Melkite) have moved to West Roxbury; Our Lady of the Cedars (Maronite) to the adjacent suburb of Jamaica Plain. St. John of Damascus Orthodox Church is even now building an edifice in Dedham, also across the line from West Roxbury; Norwood has long had its own Orthodox church, St. George's, as has Cambridge, St. Mary's. St. Matthew's, established just a couple of years ago in West Roxbury, is a non-Chalcedonian Orthodox church which conducts services in Aramaic.

### New Immigrants

Moving to the suburbs has given the churches a new lease on life as has the recent influx of immigrants from the Middle East, many of them attracted by Boston's world famous colleges and universities. In some cases, too, these new immigrants have founded new churches to meet their own particular spiritual needs; the Arabic Evangelical Church in West Roxbury is a case in point, as is St. Mark's Coptic Church in Newton. Muslims among the newcomers have found a home in the New England Islamic Center in Quincy, which was established about 20 years ago by several Lebanese families, and which today draws worshippers of many nationalities from a radius of up to a hundred miles.

Partly as a result of this new wave of immigration and partly as a result of the ethnic revival which has swept across the country, second-, third-, and fourth-generation Arab-Americans lately have developed a heightened ethnic consciousness and a stronger sense of connection to the lands of their ancestors. An added impetus to this development was the telecast in 1976, as part of the Bicentennial celebration, of a program which traced the history of the city's Arab community and which was beamed to a large audience throughout eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island and parts of New Hampshire. Four years later, an hour documentary on Boston's Syrian-



Lebanese, broadcast over a local public radio station, served a similar purpose.

The Arab community is learning to make better use of the media to reach its own people, if not others. Boston has long had at least one weekly radio program to play Arabic music and announce community news such as deaths, picnics and *hafis*. Lately, more issue-oriented programming has emerged in the form of a 30-minute radio program, "Middle East Insights," sponsored by the National Association of Arab-Americans, which holds in-depth interviews with people from the Arab world or from the Arab-American community. On television, the Sunday morning "Arabic Hour" presents a mix of interviews, news reports and analysis, cooking instruction and entertainment.

## Old and New

The institutional life of the community continues to evolve in other ways as well. Older organizations persist—some women's clubs, some village clubs, many church clubs, the Nicholas G. Geram Veterans' Association, the American-Arabic Association (AMARA) which, through Project Loving Care, aids children in Lebanon and in Jerusalem. At the same time, new organizations, reflecting the changing concerns of the community, are born. The American Arabic Benevolent Association, for instance, is raising funds to build a home for the elderly in the community, and the William G. Abdalah Memorial Library is collecting and housing materials on Arab heritage and the Arab-American experience.

Some of the newer organizations are made up of more recent immigrants or sojourners from the Middle East. In this category are the Arab student unions at colleges like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard, Northeastern and Boston University, which sponsor lectures on Arab culture, history and politics. The Syrian Club of Boston works closely with these students and engages in a variety of other activities—they hold classes in Arabic, for instance, and are the moving force behind "The Arabic Hour" television

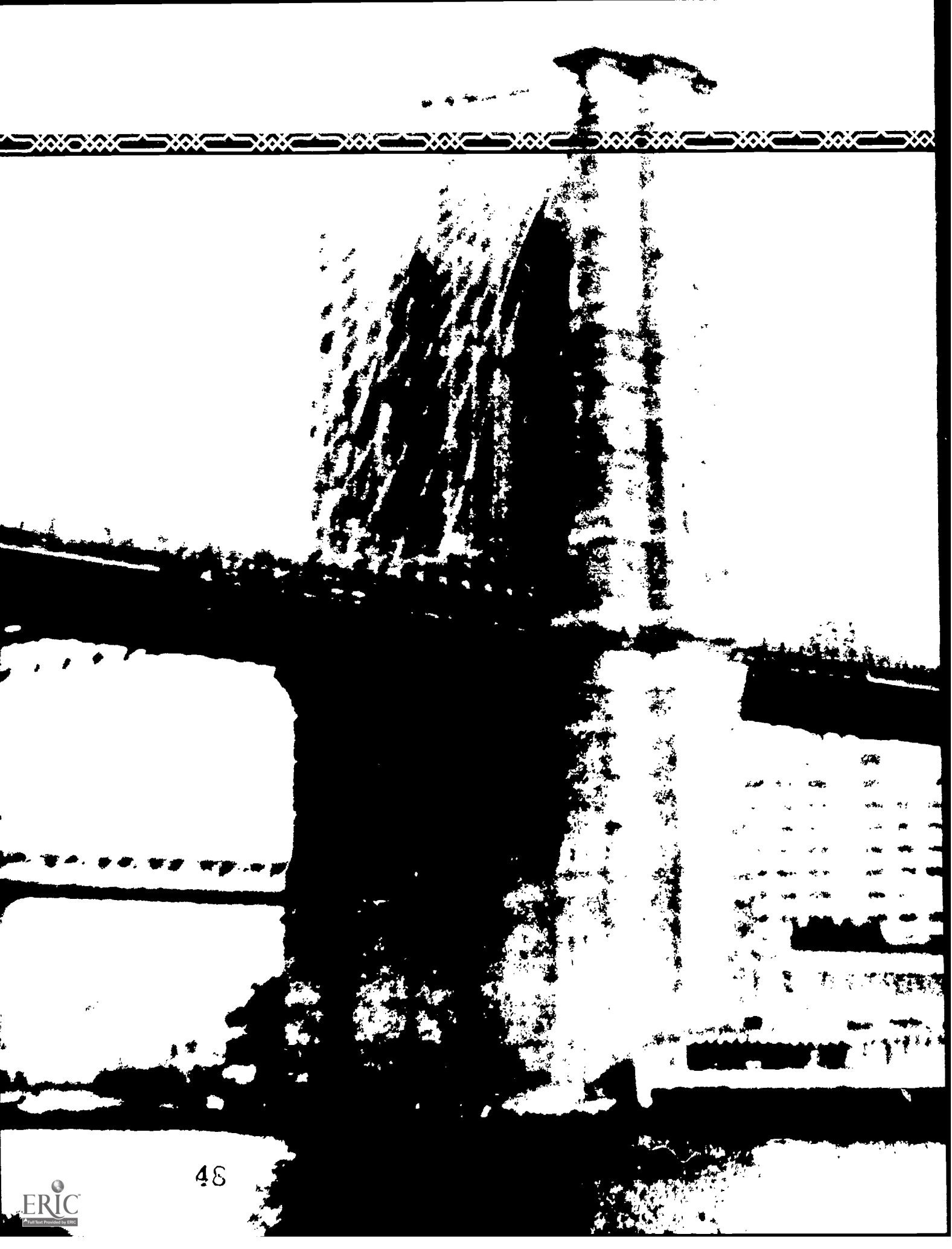
show—all aimed at heightening the community's consciousness of its ethnic identity. Two of the newest groups, whose membership includes people of non-Arab descent, direct most of their attention to the Near East itself. One, the North American Friends of Palestinian Universities, works to promote and defend academic freedom in colleges on the West Bank; the other, Women for Women in Lebanon, collects funds for sewing workshops and other small enterprises that help Palestinian and Lebanese women, whose lives were devastated by the Israeli invasion, to achieve economic independence.

Finally, national Arab organizations have made their way to the Boston area. The Association of Arab-American University Graduates and the Institute of Arab Studies share an office building in Belmont, just a stone's throw from Boston; the American-Middle East Peace Research Institute has moved its headquarters from Washington, DC to Boston. And in the last few years, the local chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee opened its regional office in Boston.

A century after the *Arabella* made port in Massachusetts, New England was swept by the "Great Awakening," a religious revival that urged a return to the piety and commitment of Winthrop, Bradford and other pioneers who had risked so much in coming to America. Today, a century after Middle Eastern emigration to America began, Arab-Americans in and around the "city upon a hill" are also reassessing the present in light of the past. They, too, are awakening to a new appreciation of their culture and to a new understanding of their history in this country. ■

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Two works that provide valuable information on Boston's Arab-American community are Jean and Kahlil Gibran's *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1974) and Elaine Hagopian's "The Institutional Development of the Arab-American Community of Boston: A Sketch," in *The Arab-Americans: Studies in Assimilation*, ed. Elaine C. Hagopian and Ann Paden (Wilmette, Illinois: Medina University Press International, 1969).





# On Freedom's Shores

by Alan Dehmer

**A** BRAHAM Mitrie Rihbany arrived in New York in 1891, like most Syrian immigrants, without friends or relatives to greet him. He spent his first nights in the United States in lower Manhattan. His sleeping accommodations, for which he paid a nickel, consisted of a wooden platform he shared with two other men. A cot and mattress and a cold water tap were available for an extra dime.

Rihbany was like thousands of other immigrants at the turn of the century, who left the political and economic turmoil of the Ottoman Empire for the dreams of a better life in America. After months at sea, the first land sighted by the immigrants was Brooklyn's tree-lined ridge facing New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty. Those fortunate enough to have a relative or friend waiting for them to complete registration at Ellis Island would be offered the comforts of home, but most spent their first nights crowded into Syrian-owned boarding houses on Washington Street.

Even for those who eventually moved on to other parts of the country, New York was the place of first and lasting impressions, where the dream of the New World was realized. And New York provided more than fond memories.

Many early Syrian settlers earned their living by peddling, and achieved financial success by opening up their own retail stores in a town or city. For those



## Faces of Brooklyn

**R**AY Rashid, co-manages Rashid Sales on Atlantic Avenue with his brother Stanley. The store, begun by their father in 1934, houses the largest inventory of Arabic records and tapes in the United States. A second-generation Arab-American, Ray takes a great deal of pride in his heritage. "I never had to deny the fact that I was an Arab . . . I'm proud of being Lebanese," said Rashid.



Ray Rashid is co-manager of Rashid Sales on Atlantic Ave.

Photo: M. Bardakas

Besides the records and tapes, Rashid Sales also carries a large selection of Arabic books, newspapers, magazines and other Arabic paraphernalia. With mail orders from around the world, it has become something of an Arab institution.

Ray, too, has gained recognition as a spokesman for the Arab-American community of Brooklyn. Having worked around Atlantic Avenue for nearly 25 years, Ray has

become something of a local celebrity and has been interviewed by *The New York Times* and several Arabic newspapers.

**Litia Namoura**, a dancer and political activist, has spent the greater part of her life involved in the arts. Her parents came to the United States from southern Lebanon in the early part of this century and settled in New England. Litia was born in Massachusetts and grew up in New Hampshire, where she was educated in Anglican schools.

Litia says she had little or no knowledge of her Arab heritage until the 1930s, when Alice Jaoudi encouraged her to form the Fine Arts Guild in Brooklyn. The Guild catered to Syrian-Lebanese girls and for the first time, Litia was making social contact with other Arab-Americans. During this period she also met and later married Habib Katibah, a writer and editor for *The Syrian World*.

It was not until the 1967 war that she began to develop her political awareness. "The 1967 war shocked me," she said. "And I began to say, well what have *you* done about it." So she began reading every day "way into the night" to educate herself on the Middle East. She has since become active in various organizations, including the U.N., and would like to write about the Middle East.

—Continued page 50

merchants, New York represented a wholesaler's heaven. Many contacts were made on Washington Street among the wholesalers and future retailers that later proved valuable when the peddler finally settled down and opened up his own business.

Those who moved away from New York relied on the many Arabic newspapers circulating after 1892 from the New York area to keep them abreast of the news from "back home." The likes of Kahlil Gibran and his New York circle of Syrian literati, Phillip Hitti in nearby Princeton, N.J., and other educators and intellectuals made New York the center of Syrian culture, art and letters. For the society of "old immigrants," the New York metropolitan area was the center of business, culture and intellectual pursuit for Arab-Americans through the 1940s.

### From Washington Street to Brooklyn

For the thousands of immigrants who made New York home, Brooklyn—with its ethnic neighborhoods, Middle Eastern bakeries and Syrian churches—was the likely choice. Moving to Brooklyn from Washington Street simply meant packing up the meager belongings they had brought on the ship, boarding the nickel ferry and crossing the East River. So appealing was that ferry ride to Brooklyn that by 1900 it is reported that approximately 3,000 Syrian immigrants had crossed the East River, establishing Brooklyn as the largest Syrian community in America.

The first place the Syrians settled was Atlantic Avenue. With its famous restaurants, Arabic book stores, bakeries and record shops, Atlantic Avenue is, to this day, considered "the Arab section" of Brooklyn.

One of the early settlers of Atlantic Avenue was a man who arrived at Ellis Island bearing, as he had from birth, the name Nahra. His grandson, Ed Alvarado, relates that his grandfather, who like most immigrants of the time spoke no English, was asked his name by immigration officials. "Nahra," he replied. "Kanatous?" came the response. "Nahra, Nahra," he



Photo: Alan Dehmer

Ed Alvarado (left) bakes bread and other Arabic delicacies in the same ovens his grandfather built in 1910 beneath the sidewalks of Atlantic Ave.



answered. And thus, Kanatous Kanatous became a registered U.S. immigrant.

In 1910, Kanatous opened one of Brooklyn's earliest bakeries, with ovens that lie beneath the sidewalk of Atlantic Avenue. His children and grandchildren, who still live in the Atlantic Avenue area, continue to bake bread daily in the same ovens Kanatous Kanatous built in 1910.

Unlike the Kanatous family of Atlantic Avenue, most of Brooklyn's Arab-American community has changed neighborhoods in the past 80 years. Economic success accounts for many of the moves—from Atlantic Avenue to Brooklyn Heights, to Park Slope and finally to Bay Ridge—but the moves also illustrate changing attitudes from one generation to the next. The churches that serve the Arab-American community of Brooklyn have been remarkably adept at keeping pace with the constant changes.

## The Old Immigrants

The faith of the old immigrants—those who arrived before World War II—was primarily Christian—Maronite, Melkite and Antiochian Orthodox. By tracing the changing locations of the various churches, the demographic shifts within Brooklyn become evident.

Brooklyn's first Syrian church was established in a renovated building near Atlantic Avenue. Virgin Mary Melkite Church, only recently torn down, served the Melkite community of Brooklyn until 1951. By the 1920s, members of the Arab-American community began moving to

In this Lebanese-owned bakery in Bay Ridge, a Syrian woman who moved to the U.S. three years ago makes her daily purchase from an employee of the store, another Syrian immigrant who has lived in Brooklyn for 15 years.

Photo: Alan Dehmer

## Faces of Brooklyn, *cont'd*

**Dr. Philip Kayal** has explored the role that Syrian churches have played in Arab-American communities. His father was born in Aleppo and came to the United States as a boy in the early part of this century. His mother, born in Brooklyn, is a second-generation Syrian-American of the Kassar family. Dr. Kayal received his Ph.D. from Fordham University in 1970. His dissertation, which he later published as a book with his brother Joe, was called *The Syrian-Lebanese in America*. "I discovered my roots as an eastern Catholic," said Kayal, "and from there I was introduced

to Arab culture."

Kayal has been active in the Melkite Church. He was formerly the editor of the church's national newsletter and the *Melkite Digest*, which has since become known as *Sopheia*. Today Kayal represents the 40,000 or so Arabs scattered throughout New Jersey as president of the New Jersey Arab Cultural Institute. ■



Philip Kayal (top) is a third-generation Brooklynite. His maternal grandparents, George & Wadia Kassar (center) came to Brooklyn from Syria around the turn of the century. By 1912, the Kassar family had grown to six children.



Brooklyn Heights, just north of Atlantic Avenue. The new and more affluent neighborhood took them away from their shops, but it also separated them from their "immigrant" image. Responding to the population shift, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church and St. Nicholas Orthodox Church were founded in Brooklyn Heights in the 1920s.

## A New Generation

The first 30 years of this century presented many difficulties for Arab-Americans. Congress was considering immigration laws that would effectively halt further emigration from the Middle East. The debates were loaded with racist barbs directed at the Syrians, as well as other immigrants, that put them in the curious position of defending the honor of their heritage by demonstrating how "American" they could be.

The greatest toll of such enforced assimilation was on the second generation. According to accounts written at the time, the advantages to the second generation of their parents' move were scant. "Our youth have not gained from their environment," began a familiar sounding letter of complaint published in New York's *Meraat-Ul-Gharb*, the Orthodox newspaper established in 1899.

In the 1920s, a popular topic of discussion was whether to teach Arabic to the American-born children. A corollary to that question was why, when Arabic classes were offered, did so few show any interest? *Al-Hoda*, the Maronite newspaper established in 1898, was an active proponent of maintaining heritage in the United States. In 1928, it offered free Arabic lessons to all comers. Only a handful of students showed up.

Fear of losing touch with the "home country" permeated the immigrants' lives, and the Brooklyn community was at the center of the cyclone. The second generation displayed little pride in their parents' heritage. Brooklyn's churches suffered a high rate of attrition—a reported 46 percent of second generation Melkites in Brooklyn left Virgin Mary Church to attend the "more American" Roman Rite churches.

The second generation tended to be apolitical. They seldom married other Syrian-Americans. Their parents' heritage meant little more than eating *tabouleh* and *kibbee* and dancing the *dubkee* at yearly gatherings. One trait the second generation shared universally with their fathers, however, was a knack for business. Like their parents, they too moved to better neighborhoods even farther away from Atlantic Avenue, this time to Park Slope.

The third generation came to ascendancy after World War II. They were better educated: many completed college and moved into professional work. This third generation began to rediscover their grandparents' heritage. In 1952, Virgin Mary Melkite Church moved to Park Slope with the hope of becoming a neighborhood church again. St. Mary's Orthodox Church also moved in the 1950s, to Bay Ridge, the newest migration site. Thus both in terms of the physical

shifts from one neighborhood to the next and in terms of their identification with Arab traditions, the third generation had come full circle. The move to Bay Ridge brought the newest generation to the same wooded banks the first immigrants had sighted upon entering New York harbor.

### New Wave

At the same time Bay Ridge was being populated by the grandchildren of the old immigrants, new immigrants were coming to Brooklyn. Again it was to Atlantic Avenue these newcomers gravitated. Yemen provided the largest influx, and over 5,000 Yemeni live in Brooklyn today. In fact, this figure is misleading. Over the past 30 years many more have lived in Brooklyn, but unlike their predecessors the Yemenis seldom emigrate for life.



Each year in Brooklyn, local Arab-Americans sponsor the "Atlantic Antic" festival, offering a taste of Arabic food and entertainment to the ethnically diverse Brooklyn community. Atlantic Avenue has served as the first home for Brooklyn's Arab immigrants throughout the century.



Yemenis, mostly men, move to this country for the express purpose of earning a better wage than they can at home. A large portion of their earnings is sent back to their families. Meanwhile, the ever-changing Yemeni population works in small shops and businesses. There are seven Yemeni restaurants in the Atlantic Avenue area.

The next largest immigrant community is Palestinian. Although they have been arriving since the end of World War II, the Palestinian community of Atlantic Avenue has swelled since 1972 when immigration quotas were opened up. Today, Palestinians in Brooklyn number between 3,000 and 4,000. Most operate supermarkets and superettes throughout Brooklyn, but Atlantic Avenue remains their favorite place of residence.

In the past few years, Brooklyn Heights has begun renovation as new, upwardly striving immigrants follow the path of earlier immigrants who found the neighborhood a welcome change from the commercial bustle of Atlantic Avenue. With the new immigrants comes a new faith. The Muslims of Yemen and Palestine are responsible for the Islamic Center in Brooklyn Heights. The center is a few blocks from Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, which now serves as the Cathedral of the Maronite Diocese. The See of the Diocese of St. Maron, formerly in Detroit, moved its offices to Brooklyn in 1972.

The old patterns persist, circles are drawn to a close and new patterns emerge in Brooklyn. One consistent pattern is the process of dissociation and separation of one ascending generation and class from the previous one. Separation seems to be a function of environment as well. "Brooklynites tend to know very little about their own territory," commented one native of that borough. "It's so large and New Yorkers are . . . well, you know how New Yorkers are."

### **"We Live From the Heart"**

But in Brooklyn, the old patterns are never erased entirely. At the St. Nicholas Home for the Aged on Ovington Avenue, Christians and Muslims, Arabs and Arab-

Americans from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan and elsewhere, have chosen to put political and religious differences aside to pray and work together for one common goal. The St. Nicholas Home for the Aged stands as a rock of unity that could serve to show the way to the future for other Arab-American communities across the United States.

"They said this place would never be built," said Dick Zarick, chairman of the board for the home. "Ninety-five percent of the Arabic-speaking people said that."

St. Nicholas Home is a testimony to the possibility of a united Arabic-speaking community. Zarick believes this and wants the world to know it.

It was Father Gregory Abboud who came up with the idea of a home for the aged in Brooklyn to be operated jointly by all the Arabic-speaking groups. Father Abboud, who came to Brooklyn as an Orthodox priest at St. Mary's, was revered by the whole community and so was successful in getting his project off the ground, but illness prevented him from seeing it completed.

Zarick, who played a central role in the construction of the home, said he made a vow to Father Abboud and to God to see the project to its end. Good to his word and to Abboud's dream, the St. Nicholas Home opened its doors on November 21, 1982, with two residents. It has expanded to full capacity—77 residents with a full time staff, including an award-winning chef who keeps everyone satisfied. A simple tour of the home—a two-story complex with kitchen, dining room, conference rooms, chapel and recreation rooms—demonstrates that harmony is the key to life there. Roughly one-fourth of the residents are of Arab heritage, but according to one Italian resident, "There are no nations here. We live from the heart."

The board of directors of the home is made up of the full spectrum of Arabic-speaking groups. Besides meeting regularly for business, board members and residents join for prayer services, which are conducted alternatively by the many different faiths in the area. Said Zarick, "We have combined into a unity like you've never seen."

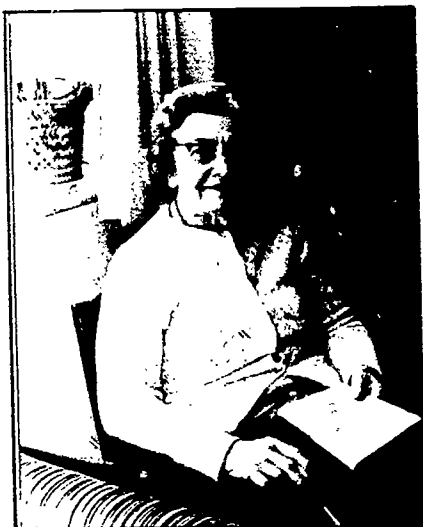


Open to everyone, St. Nicholas Home for the Aged in Brooklyn has been called a gift to the city of New York from the Arabic-speaking people.

Dick Zarick, the Home's founder and director, provides able guidance and leadership to this "rock of unity." Zarick (left)

is shown here with some of St. Nicholas' 77 residents.

Photos: Alan Dehmer







# Our Ellis Island

**T**HAT blonde girl studying piano in the affluent Detroit suburb Grosse Pointe . . .

That autoworker in Dearborn, cradling a cup of tea in grease-stained hands in the hole-in-the-wall coffeehouse . . .

That middle-aged grocer with the slightly wary look that comes from one too many robberies in a tough Southfield street . . .

They all have something in common. They are part of the complex, growing and changing Arab-American community of Detroit.

Some call Detroit the Ellis Island of Arab-Americans. It's the biggest concentration of Arab-Americans in the country—some 250,000 in the 4.7 million metro area. Immigrants have been arriving since the 1890s to the industrial center.

Immigration is a living fact in Detroit. These days, three of every five new immigrants to the area comes from the Middle East, totalling some 10,000 arrivals a year. In fact, Arab-Americans now make up the fastest-growing minority in the area. One schoolteacher in the bilingual program of the public schools noted, "You can see it here; 42 percent of our students last year were Arabic or Chaldean speakers."

One sad fact unites most immigrants over the years to the Detroit area: They left their homelands because of political and social upheavals there. But as well they are united by the faith and hope they place in their new land. As one recent

# Faces of Detroit

by Kathy Eadeh

**S**Ocial worker and community activist, **Dr. Katherine Nagher** came to Detroit in 1969 after receiving her Ph.D. in 1962 in International Relations from the University of Pennsylvania. (Nagher is a Pennsylvania native, having been born in Wilkes-Barre.)

Nagher enjoys the harmonious working relationships among different parts of the Arab-American community in Detroit. "I believe all mankind are brother and sister," she says. "I believe in Kahlil Gibran's words, 'You are all fingers on the loving hand of God.'"

Nagher, whose parents came from Lebanon, also appreciates the richness of Arab civilization. Remembering her father's

regular comment—"There is no civilization like the Arab civilization"—she particularly enjoyed a trip to her parents' homeland.

**Adil Akrawi**, a 42-year-old Chaldean grocery store owner, is also president of Detroit's Iraqi Democratic Union. He is a survivor of political repression in Iraq, where he came from in 1969. Going to work in Detroit for Chrysler, he was fired in 1974 after leading a protest walkout on health and safety issues. He opened a grocery store in 1975, and although he has experienced tension between Arabs and blacks, says, "Both blacks and Arabs share the problem of being hurt by 'the system.'"

—Continued page 58



Photo: Bob Buchta

**Adil Akrawi moved to the United States to escape persecution in 1969. An established Detroit store owner, Akrawi says he still has not adjusted to American life styles.**

refugee from the violence of Beirut, sheltering his young daughter in his arms, put it, "I feel like I've been born again."

These are not the best times to come to Detroit, though with unemployment high and the future bleak for industrial recovery. Still, many benefit, even in hard times, from the existence of thriving Arab-American communities, where they can find familiar languages, familiar foods, perhaps a social service tailored to their needs, and possibly even friends and relatives from "home."

Only recently have the different peoples of the Arab world who settled here come to term themselves "Arab-Americans," to make first steps toward raising a united voice. But as long as Arab-Americans have been arriving, they have vigorously asserted their own regional and local identities.

## Strong Identities

First to come were the Syrian-Lebanese, who today make up nearly half the Arab-American population, with 100,000 people. (Most came from what is now Lebanon.) First arriving in significant numbers in the 1890s, they tended to come in "chains" of friends and neighbors from the same region and religion.

They live mingled in among other ethnic groups throughout Detroit's eastern suburbs.

Next to arrive were the Chaldeans, who began immigrating in 1910 and dramatically increased in the late 1950s and 1960s, as political upheavals shook their native Iraq. Many more have arrived since 1967. The Chaldeans, speakers of a language derived from ancient Aramaic, are distinctive even within Iraq, and those who came to Detroit are more distinctive still. Many come from one village within Iraq—Telkaif. Chaldeans now make up 20 percent of the area's Arab-American population, and they mostly work in retail business. Chaldeans own fully 80 percent of the area's 1,400 mom-and-pop grocery stores. Their strong regional and linguistic identity is well-represented, especially in the Southfield neighborhood, where the community founded the Southfield

Manor. It is an impressive new social center where, many parents hope, their traditions will endure despite assimilating attractions of mainstream culture.

Palestinians make up 12.5 percent of Arab-Americans in the area. First arriving in the 1920s, they followed a familiar pattern of Arab immigration—one family member brought over others, until entire family networks and village networks were re-created in the New World. Many Palestinians in Detroit came from the

offered Yemenis a six-month leave to arrange for their families to immigrate too, many Yemenis found the very idea of permanent migration offensive.

Other ethnic pockets in this community suggest the rich diversity of Arab culture—for instance, the Egyptian Copts. Once widely scattered throughout Michigan, in 1976 this small but determined group built the first Coptic church in Michigan, in Troy (a northern suburb of Detroit). Members of the



**Many members of Detroit's diverse Arab-American community are shop owners. 80% of the 1,400 mom-and-pop grocery stores in Detroit are owned by Chaldean-Americans alone.**

*Photo: Mazen Eadeh*

West Bank town of Ramallah. (Detroit is the national center for the nationwide, 20,000 member American Federation of Ramallah, Palestine.) Since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Palestinian immigration has soared.

The highly-distinctive Yemeni population makes up some 5 percent of the Arab-American community. Nine-tenths of them are men, and they come from one rural area in Yemen, where they usually own land. They come for a year, or two, or several, to earn money and return to their families. "We are saving money for our future—in Yemen," says one. They are so unified in that goal that when the United Auto Workers, which counts some 4,700 Arabs among the 35,000 workers in their Rouge plant,

Druze community have settled in Detroit, Flint and Saginaw. One of the ways they stay in contact is through the American Druze Public Affairs Committee, whose chair Kamal Shouhayib often has the job, these days, of explaining to the media just who the Druze are.

### **Community Life Flourishes**

Over time, Detroit has become a center for Arab-American institutions. Among the associations with chapters or offices in Detroit are the American Federation of Ramallah, Palestine; the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee; the Association of Arab-American University Graduates; and the

## Faces of Detroit, *continued*

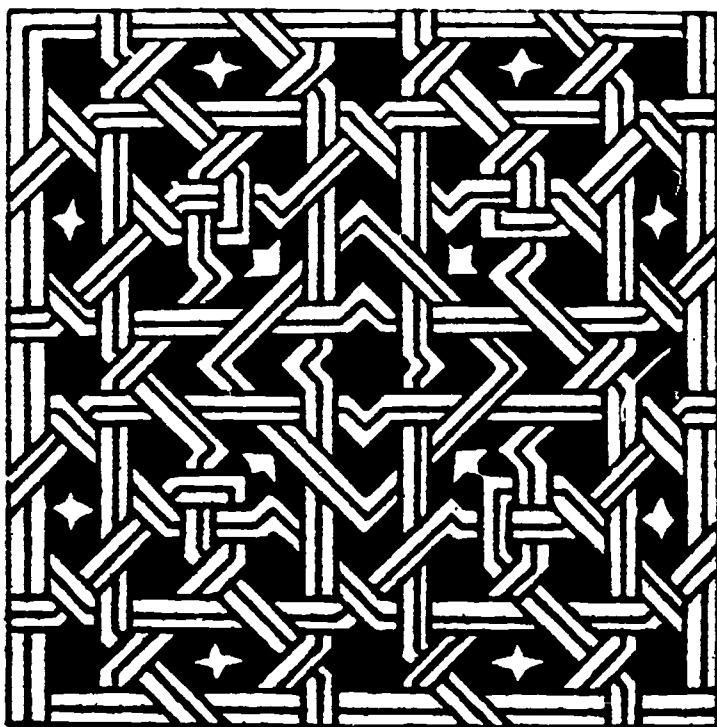
That's where the problems are, not among the minorities."

Adil is proud of the Arab-American community of Detroit: "It is unique—we are all keeping our culture alive, and working together. People are proud because they are Palestinians, or Yemenis or Chaldeans, but we must all be proud of the fact that first we are Arabs." Still, he says, there is no substitute for home, and he stills feels like a stranger in the U.S.

When **Teghrid (Terry) Ahwal**, a 27-year-old police officer who also works at the Yemen Arab Republic consulate, first came to the U.S. a decade ago, "Life was very lonely." She came with her sister, and her family from Ramallah, Palestine, joined her in 1974. "Now,"

she says, "I have the best of two worlds. I can appreciate the beauty of two very different cultures." She is taking pre-law courses at the University of Michigan, Dearborn.

19-year-old **Nabil Khoury**'s parents moved to the U.S. to give their children a better life. His mother is from Damascus, Syria and his father is from Jerusalem, Palestine. Now Nabil is studying medicine in the hopes of returning to the Middle East as a physician. He has visited the Middle East several times and, he says, "I identify first as an Arab and then as an American. Maybe because I feel deprived of a homeland, I emphasize my ethnic identity." Nabil feels that the Detroit Arab-American community must "pull together" because "we need an identity, a background and cohesion." ■



National Association of Arab Americans. Several student groups meet the needs of Arab students studying in the area, and of university students who are learning about Arab culture at such institutions as Wayne State University. The Palestine Aid Society and the Arabic Center for Cultural and Social Services help out Arab-Americans in urgent need and social clubs proliferate. It is, then, no surprise to find a wealth of media serving the special needs and interests of Arab-Americans in the area—the newspaper *Iraqi*, the magazine *Hathahe Ramallah*, the television show "The Arab Voice," and radio programs "Arabesque" and "Middle Eastern Melodies."

Lifestyles of Arab-Americans are as diverse as their heritages. Perhaps most distinctive is the near-enclave of "Southend" in Dearborn, where the population is 75 percent Arab, where Sunni mosques dot the neighborhood and where you may need to be able to read Arabic to read the signs on the street. If the locale seems to border on a ghetto to some, it means close-knit community to others. One bakery owner says proudly, "Where else could you live and know everybody within a 20-block radius?"

With continuing immigration comes constant change, as the recent history of the Muslim mosque testifies. Over the course of generations it has more and more come to resemble a middle-American style church. When new immigrants flooded into the area in the 1960s and 1970s, traditional fundamentalists began attending and influencing the mosque's policy. Now, stricter dress codes and sex segregation during services reflect the dominance of a more fundamentalist Muslim tradition.

## Fighting for Recognition

Racism and ethnic discrimination have consistently marred the immigrants' experience. Some Chaldean grocers, for instance, have found themselves in conflict with members of the black communities where they have their shops. Recently a group trying to buy a building for a mosque encountered what one of

them called "vicious anti-Arab attitudes." The problems of one Yemeni auto worker suggest an endemic problem. When he reported to his supervisor that his foreman regularly insulted him, the foreman declared, "You think you scare me going to the supervisor, camel jockey?" Indeed, the man was fired. There is also pervasive discrimination that children face. Kathy Eadeh, a Palestinian-American in her 20s, now working as Detroit coordinator for ADC, recalls, "When I was growing up, the kids would call me A-rab and a PLO terrorist."

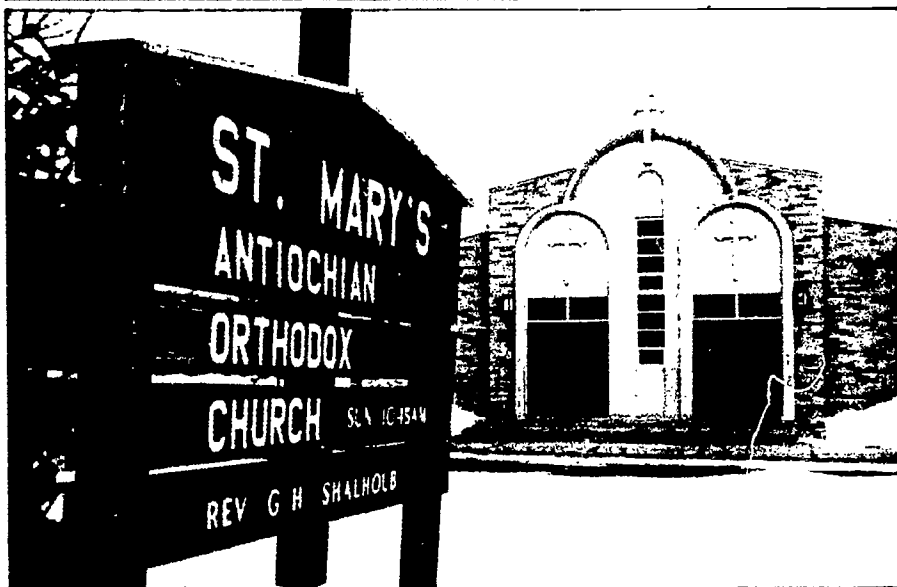
Finding a political voice--that basic tool of self-defense for American subcultures--has not been easy for Arab-Americans, even in the ethnic stronghold of Detroit. They are close to invisible in Michigan politics; only five Arab-American surnames appear on the rolls of 1,000 state bureaucrats, for example. But Arab-American leaders exist among different subcommunities. For instance, two Chaldean political leaders--Joe Solaka and Sami Jihad--were among those who worked on the campaign of the current governor. Jihad is now deputy personnel director for the governor. Abdeen Jabara, a board member of ADC and an activist civil rights lawyer, regularly investigates violations of civil and political rights of Arabs and Arab-Americans in the Detroit area. He once waged a campaign to get Arabs the status of a legally protected minority, thus making them eligible for affirmative action programs.

Now there is a growing self-consciousness. One evidence of it is a voter registration drive that the Ramallah club is organizing of Arab-Americans across the country for the 1984 elections. "We have a golden opportunity," says new Ramallah president Isa Hasan. "It's too bad that the Middle East crisis has forced us to concentrate our energies on that, because there are so many other areas, especially the involvement of Arab Americans in the American political system." Druze spokesman Shouhayib echoes Hasan's sentiment, saying, "The Druzes are known for being loyal to the country they live in; we want to perform our citizenship responsibilities." He has found ADC "an inspiration," because it "acts as a



**Detroit's ethnic diversity is portrayed in its variety of religious expression. The social life of many Arab-Americans centers in their church or mosque.**

Photo: Bob Rader



cohesive force in the Arab community."

The Detroit ADC chapter's role has recently reflected the several facets of the organization. In a rally for Jesse Jackson--which had an overflow crowd of 1,000--ADC encouraged Arab-American participation in electoral politics. ADC has also been involved in defense of civil and political rights of individuals, for instance forcing an investigation of incidents at the American-Canadian border where Arabs reportedly received discriminatory treatment. As well, ADC has sponsored educational and cultural events, including poetry readings. Now ADC is formalizing an advice practice, organizing a speakers bureau for area schools.

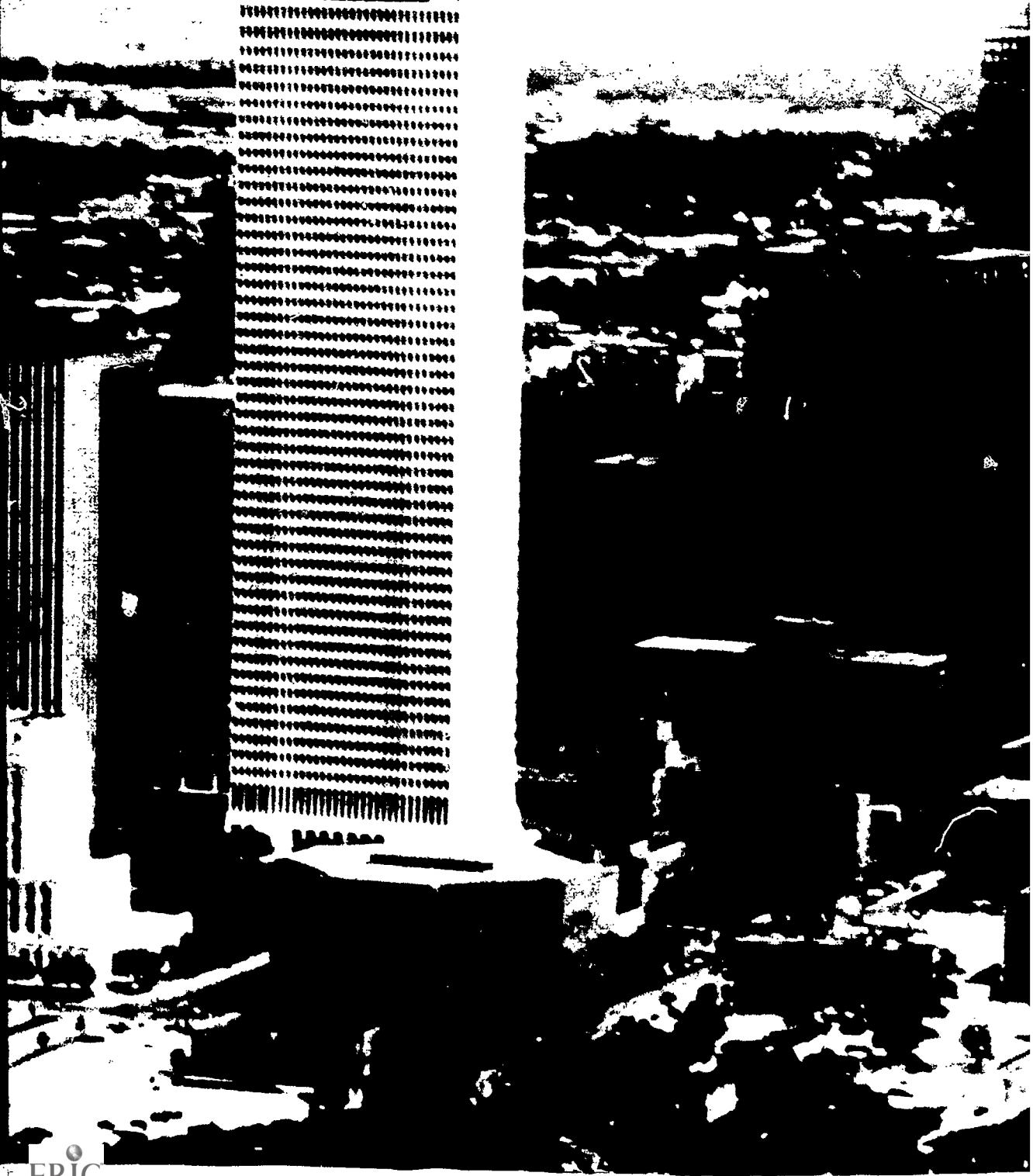
Arab-Americans have met the challenge to survive in America's industrial heartland. Now they are meeting the new challenge, to grow and unite.





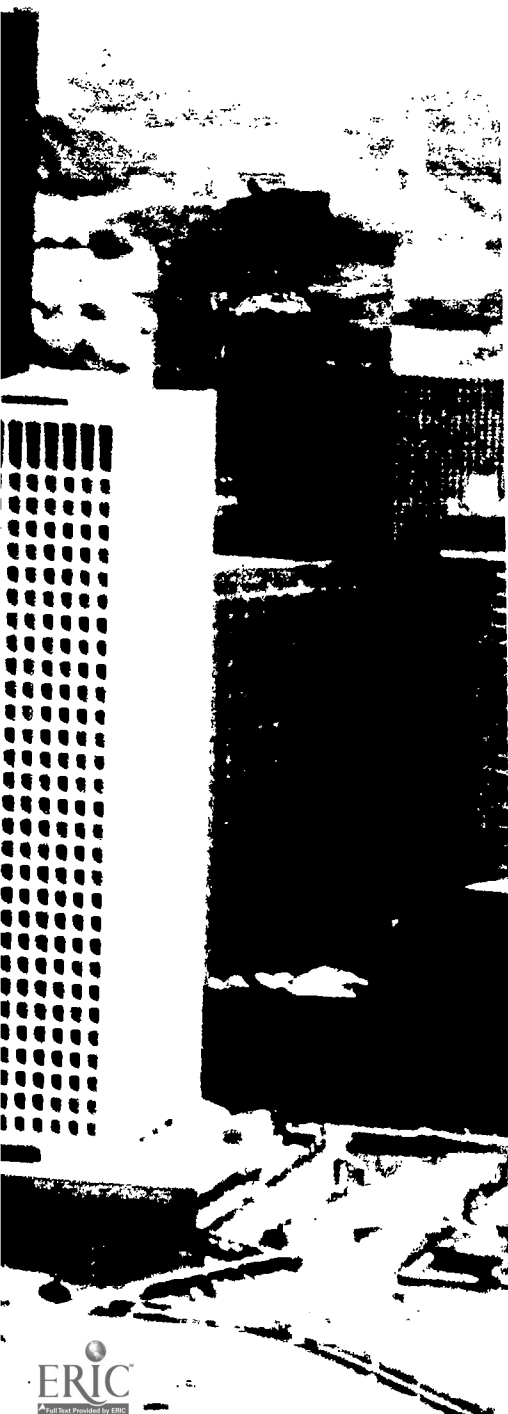
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# In the Heart of Texas

by Jane Peterson



**H**OUSTON has changed a lot," notes Ruth Ann Skaff, a native daughter recently returned. After years away in the Peace Corps and graduate school, she finds, not only the city, but also her own Arab-American community much enlarged.

"The texture of the community has changed a great deal," she adds. To the old established Houstonites who came from what was then known as Greater Syria at the turn of the century, a new element has been added, Palestinian and Lebanese for the most part, though there are Egyptians and Iraqis as well, and smaller numbers of Saudis, Moroccans and Tunisians.

"I was in Houston," laughs an Arab-American resident of Austin, "and there was an Iranian or Arab on every street corner."

Houston claims more than half of the Arab-American population of Texas, about 15,000 to 20,000. It is a vast, sprawling city of more than one and a half million people and, as everyone knows, a boom town. Not only foreigners come to share in Houston's opportunities, but many Americans from other parts of the country as well, including Arab-Americans.

The ground-breakers came to Houston in the 1880s from Greater Syria, part of a steady flow that continued until the early 1920s, when restrictive immigration quotas stemmed it.



## Faces of Houston

**T**ry to separate the church from politics," says **Father Joseph Shahada**, a relatively recent arrival to Houston from Allentown, Pa.

In Allentown, Father Joseph worked closely with the Monsour Medical Center and ADC's Save Lebanon program. He also helped organize the ADC chapter in Johnstown.

Father Joseph's congregation at St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Houston is comprised primarily of Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians. "The church continues to believe in the inalienable rights of man, and speaks out against the atrocities of man and political justice," says Father Joseph. He says that his interest in ADC and Middle East affairs was heightened by the 1982 assault on

Beirut "in more of a humanitarian nature than a political one."

When plastic surgeon **Dr. Abdul-Kader Fustock** volunteered his services to the Save Lebanon program, he felt it was "the least" he could do. "But of course I am not satisfied. When you see a few children, you know hundreds more are still out there."

Born and raised in Aleppo, Syria, Dr. Fustock studied and practiced medicine in France before coming to Houston. He went through the training program at St. Joseph's Hospital, where he sensed some bitterness among other residents: "Many . . . felt I had taken the place of someone else."

—Continued page 64



**Father Joseph Shahada**

## Peddlers to Professionals

Like their fellows in other American cities, the early Arab immigrants often began as peddlers, a pursuit they managed to trade in rather quickly for their own small business establishments. In many cases, they journeyed back to the old country to fetch brides. Some became extremely wealthy.

These early settlers sent most of their many children to college. Although figures are not readily available, it is thought that at least half of the Arab-Americans in Houston today are college graduates, and many are professionals.

Professional associations, however, are relatively small. The Texas chapter of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG) has only 100 members, according to chemist Samir Ashrawi, "though there are many more out there." The same is true of the Arab-American Medical Association in Texas, which has 103 members.

Although the original Arab-Americans experienced discrimination at first, their descendents widely report that they have not personally encountered prejudice, though one first-generation Lebanese-American recalls being mistaken for a Mexican as a child and thus discovering racism.

Whereas the earlier arrivals were almost exclusively Christian, newer immigrants represent both the Islamic and the Christian faiths. Most newcomers have fled political strife in the Middle East, particularly the occupation of the West Bank and the civil conflict in Lebanon.

Like the earlier immigrants, they are very industrious and successful, but they are also already highly educated and many are professionals. They tend to be a little more politically active and considerably more concerned about events in the Middle East than their predecessors. For the early group, explained one Lebanese-American, Lebanon and Syria are "80 years and 7,000 miles away."

The exact size of the Arab-American population is not known. Although the Bureau of the Census recently put out an ethnicity study, it is considered incomplete for several reasons.

"When the census came out," recalls Joanne Andera, a first-generation Lebanese-American who directs Special Events and the Texas Folklife Festival at the Institute of Texan Culture in San Antonio, "we said, 'What do we put?' I said, 'I'm gonna put Lebanese.' But a lot of our friends said, 'I'm Anglo,' and that's what they put."

Perhaps the highest degree of assimilation is seen among Arab-Americans who joined Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches. Many of these, according to several Orthodox pastors with long experience in the community, no longer maintain ties with their past.

The greater part of the population, however, does cling to its roots. They are proud of their origins and take pleasure in carrying on folk traditions, particularly the food and the dances. Their social life tends to revolve around family and the Arab-American community.

### Festivals and Clubs

A weekly radio program on Houston's station KPFT, the "Arab Hour," celebrates Arab culture, and last year's Mediterranean Festival sponsored by St. George Greek Orthodox Church enjoyed so much success that it will be repeated this year. At the University of Houston, students held a Palestinian festival in May.

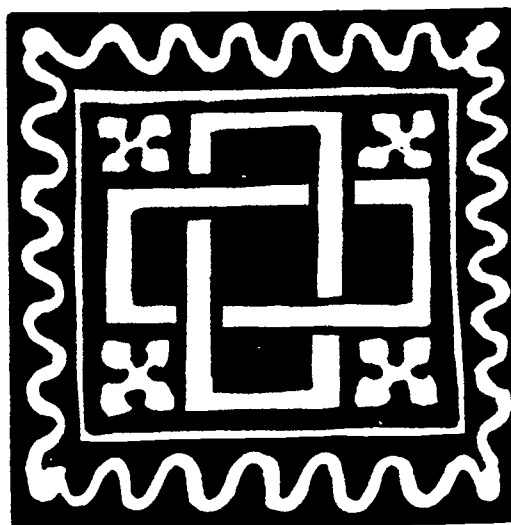
The Southern Federation of Syrian Lebanese American Clubs, a social organization founded in 1931 to celebrate and promote the cultural heritage within the community, is strong in Houston. So are the Lebanese Med Club and the Jamail Club, to which members of the extensive Jamail family belong. The Ramallah and El Nassar clubs are increasingly active, and numerous Arab student organizations have sprouted on the university's central campus.

Houston's Arab-Americans enjoy considerable success in retail establishments, real estate, and oil, as well as the professions. Some of these are represented in the "Arab-American Business Directory" put out by ADC and AAUG.

And yet, says former ADC chapter director Ellen Mansour, Arab-Americans

are not recognized "as a community" in Houston. There are prominent individuals who are not known to be Arab and many members of the group do not know each other.

ADC has done a "very creditable job" in changing the situation in the last three years, observes Ruth Ann Skaff, who finds it "very encouraging." But, she adds, "there is still a long way to go . . . We can and should be more prominent given the significance of the community and the importance of Houston."



**A**rab-Americans in other Texas cities have much in common with those in Houston—their pattern of immigration, their prosperity, and their involvement in family and culture. If anything, they may be slightly less visible in the community at large.

### Austin

Primarily Christians from Greater Syria, many of Austin's early settlers came from the village of Elmina near Tripoli.

Gene Attal, director of the Seton Fund and a third-generation American on one side, second on the other, describes it as a "laid back" community. "There is tremendous interest in the culture," he says, "the food and the dances," but they focus on it, not politics.

## Faces of Houston, *continued*

Dr. Fustock helped found the local chapter of the AAMA and also served as president. He finds the organization professionally and socially valuable. He praises the role of ADC in the community and feels

among Arab-Americans in Houston, introducing newcomers to the older residents.

Ms. Drooby and her husband, Dr. Ala Drooby, left Beirut in 1973, perceiving that the civil strife would worsen. They settled briefly in Australia,



**Dr. Abdul-Kader Fustock, born and raised in Syria, feels Arab-Americans need to cooperate more. Dr. Fustock is a plastic surgeon in Houston.**

that Arab-Americans need to cooperate more.

"If we want to care about each other, we have to know about each other," says **Nabila Drooby**. Widely known in the community as one who gives of herself, Ms. Drooby sees her role in the five years she and her family have lived in Houston as one of "facilitator," helping to further understanding of her culture among Americans. She also served informally as intermediary

then came to America for the sake of their three children.

Ms. Drooby has seen an improvement in the level of understanding, but says "it's not fast enough. Maybe I want too much. I think that the war has made people aware that there are other people and that these people suffer, but I think it's a shallow awareness."

Ms. Drooby would also like to see greater awareness among Arab-Americans of their own roots. "We have a wonderful heritage of three major faiths, with a wisdom which evolves from these faiths . . . We have much to offer." ■

The visibility of Arab-Americans, who now number about 1200, is undoubtedly higher than it was 20 years ago. Noted anthropologist Elizabeth Fernea recalls arriving in Austin in 1966 and venturing forth with her husband to find the local Syrian club. They found it, only after great difficulty—behind an unmarked door.

## Dallas-Ft. Worth

Like Houston, the Dallas-Ft. Worth area has attracted many of the recent Arab-American immigrants as well as the internal migrants, Arab-Americans from other parts of the United States. About 2800 live in Dallas and Ft. Worth and the "mid-cities."

Early immigrants came to Dallas from Greater Syria, beginning with a small group of families who travelled from Marjayoun via Oklahoma City. More recent arrivals stem from modern Syria, Jordan, and Egypt; Dallas-Ft. Worth is also home to the largest number of Palestinians in the state outside of Houston, perhaps 50% of the total Arab-American community. There is also a small number of Chaldeans and Assyrians.

"People [in the community] do not know each other," observes Father McLuckie, the Orthodox pastor. He describes the churches as the primary social centers in the community. The Islamic Center is primarily Pakistani. There is also a mosque in Ft. Worth, and both centers offer instruction in Arabic.

According to Samir Pasha, who started a chapter of the NAAA in Dallas in November 1983, Arab-Americans there tend to socialize informally. Perhaps 30% are married to non-Arab Americans.

One interested observer sees a great need for ADC: "If people in this area knew of ADC, they would recruit themselves." Others, Palestinians who have lived in the area for 15 years or more, state that they have never experienced discrimination.

Dallas, like other urban centers in Texas, boasts a number of prominent entrepreneurs, oilmen, lawyers and doctors. Dr. Michel DeBakey, a

cardiovascular surgeon of national prominence, is the son of Lebanese immigrants. Najeeb Halaby was well known as a leader in aviation, both in the government and the private sector, when he became the father-in-law of King Hussein of Jordan.

## El Paso

El Paso's Arab-American community comprises roughly 3,000 people, or less than 1% of the city's total. Most arrived between 1914 and 1921 via Mexico, but a number came in the last decade. It is a tight community, according to its leaders, and yet assimilated to a high degree.

Father John Elias, pastor of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, estimates 600-700 Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians and Palestinians in his congregation. In the larger community there are people from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and North Africa. There is a new mosque in El Paso, and local Catholic and Protestant churches are attended by some Arab-Americans.

Father Elias estimates that 80% of the community are engaged in business; the rest are professionals. Attempts to launch chapters of the Southern Federation and NAAA have been unsuccessful because, thinks Father Elias, "of the crisis in the Middle East."

St. George's holds a festival to celebrate Arab culture each year, and Father Elias hopes to establish an Arab cultural center someday.

## San Antonio

San Antonio's Arab-American population is unique in that it is closely connected with the Hispanic community. "All of us speak Spanish," says Ms. Andera. "My mother learned Spanish before she learned English." The Lebanese immigrants who arrived in San Antonio around the turn of the century settled in the city's west end, a Hispanic district.

"Half the Mexican restaurants are owned by Lebanese," adds Ms. Andera. One of the city's most prominent restaurateurs, Ralph Karam, was voted

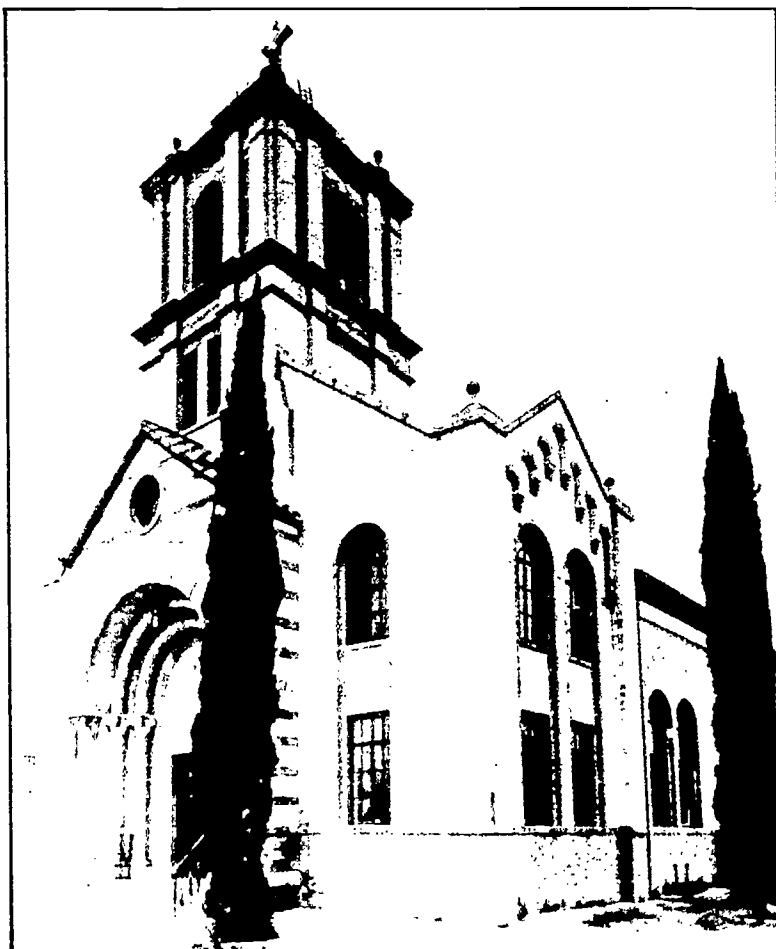
honorary king in the annual LULAC (League of United Latin American Communities) festival last year.

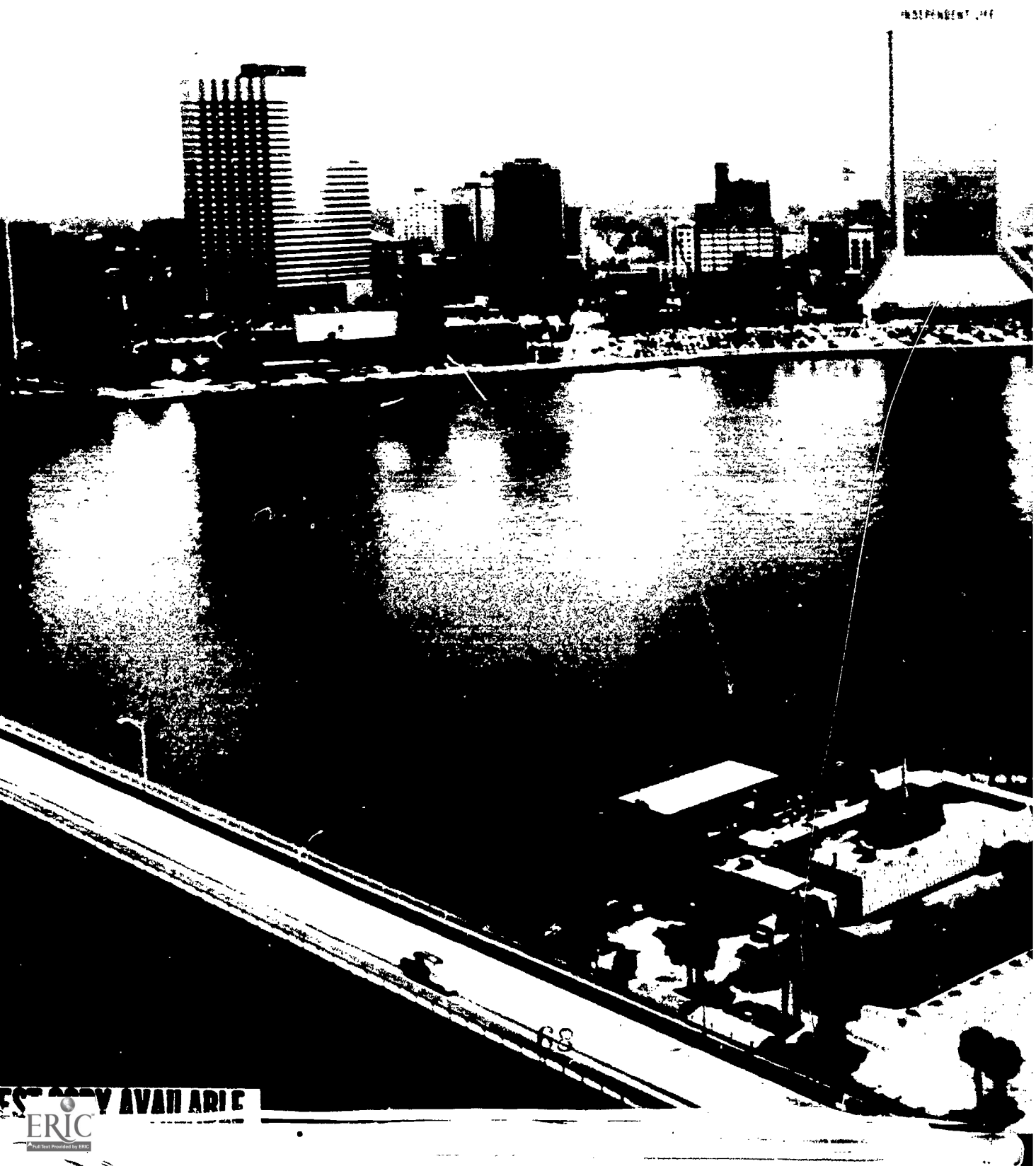
Citing other prominent members of the community, Ms. Andera points out, "Every one of these men had a woman pushing them . . . all the wives were working in the kitchen when their husbands started." Mr. Karam's wife, Josephine, actually ran a tamale factory before the restaurant was opened, and it was her brother, Joseph Curry, who invented the machine for stuffing tamales.

Ms. Andera, who speaks Arabic, says that many of her peers do not. She recalls their disappointment over the refusal of their parents to teach them the language. Recently, there was an uproar in the Maronite congregations over attempts to switch to English, a shift that was made long ago in many Orthodox churches. A compromise resolved the conflict, and now the liturgy is celebrated in English but the consecration is in Aramaic.

**The Maronite Christians of San Antonio, who comprise some 80 percent of the Arab-American community in that city, formed their parish and established their church in 1925.**

Photo. "The Syrians and Lebanese in Texas"






INDEPENDENT, IFF



## JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

# As Salaam Aleikum, Y'all

by Anthony Toth



**I**F a Jacksonville, Fla., sandwich shop owner delivers a molasses-smooth "Y'all come back now," as you walk out his door, don't be too sure that he's a Floridian from way back. His ethnic roots may just as well be in the south of Lebanon as the Deep South because this North Florida city has the largest Arab-American community in the southeast. Residents estimate that in the metro area of half a million people, there are between 15,000 and 20,000 Arab-Americans.

Jacksonville's Arab-American community is as varied in composition as any in the United States. Approximately 70 percent of the Arab-American population there traces its ancestry to Syria or Lebanon, and another 20 percent to Palestine, mostly from Ramallah. The remaining 10 percent come from other Arab countries, among them Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Arab-Americans have built social institutions that preserve some of the traditions of the "old country," but they have assimilated and are an integral part of the Jacksonville community. Some Syrians have family trees whose roots reach back a hundred years in the history of this large north Florida city.

In 1968, Duval and Jacksonville governments merged into one city which boasts the largest geographic area in the US and has a population of 540,000. Jacksonville Arab-Americans estimate that members of their community own and

## Faces of Jacksonville

**T**OM Toney's grandfather was among the first dozen Syrian immigrants living in Jacksonville in 1895, and Tom and his children have a keen awareness of their roots.

Tom's grandfather retired in 1927 after building the city's largest wholesale produce company. The produce business was sold and Tom's father went into the retail business. Tom continues the family's involvement in the commercial activity of Jacksonville by running Toney's Sandwich Shop. Before buying the shop six years ago, Tom worked in the accounting department of Seaboard Coastline Railroad.

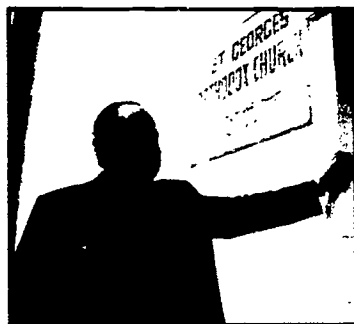
Tom has been active in Jacksonville's Arab-American community as president of the Salaam Club, and sat on its board of directors for 13 years. He says, "My heritage is one thing I am very proud of," though he speaks little Arabic. "If I'm in the midst of a group (of Arabic speaking) people, I can pick it up," he says. "My father always said 'Talk to me in English.'"

After running a small construction firm, Big Dot Builders, for 37 years, **Joudi Abraham** is preparing to turn over the reins to his son. Abraham contributed his time and skill to help build St. George Orthodox Church. "We all pitched in to build the church," he

68 says. Abraham has also

been president of the Salaam Club and remains an active member.

Before moving to Jacksonville, because he had "enough of the North," he worked at the Ford Motor Company near Detroit, like many other Arab-Americans. Abraham's



**Father Nicholas Dahdal ministers to the Antiochian Orthodox parish of St. George. The church is a nucleus for Arab-American cultural and social activities.**

Photo: Tony Toth

father came to the United States from Syria in 1905 to earn enough to bring his wife over after World War I. Abraham's three children are grown now, and don't participate in the Salaam Club's family activities like they used to, but Abraham speculates that when they begin raising their own families, they will go back.

**Mudelellah Elias** was born in Ramallah in 1922 and has worked as a nurse for much of her life—four years at Jacksonville's St. Luke Hospital and 10 years at Methodist Hospital, where she works now. Before coming to the United States in 1960, she was head nurse at an Amman hospital.

—Continued page 70

operate between 300 and 400 commercial establishments. They are prominent in the restaurant business, real estate, insurance, law, medicine, construction and a host of enterprises that have fueled the area's economy—including politics.

In 1915, Tommy Hazouri's parents came to Jacksonville, where his father operated a grocery store. In 1974, Hazouri became the first Florida legislator of Arab descent. After his re-election to the Florida House in 1976, he became the youngest chairman of a standing House committee.

Jack Demetree's construction firm has contracts for tens of millions of dollars in building projects all over the southeast. George Helow, whose parents emigrated from Lebanon in 1908 and then moved to Jacksonville in 1932, is now president of a chain of almost 30 convenience stores in the southeast.

### Peddlers Find a Home

Although the first Arab immigrants settled in Jacksonville nearly a century ago, little has been written about the origins and growth of the community. The most recent and comprehensive treatment of this subject is a study, now in the process of publication, by Gladys Howell, a former Jacksonville resident who taught sociology at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C. Reporter Kerry Duke related some of her findings in an article that appeared in the *Florida Times-Union* in 1982.

Howell reports that Arab immigrants came to Jacksonville in three waves. The pioneer group arrived between 1890 and 1920, a second group came between 1920 and the end of World War II, and a third, consisting primarily of Palestinians, began to immigrate in 1948 following the creation of Israel.

The earliest Arab settlers formed the cultural nexus of the Jacksonville Arab-American community. Most were Christians who came to the United States seeking greater economic and religious freedom. But why Jacksonville?

One version of the story is that an Arab who owned a household wares business put new immigrants to work



peddling his merchandise around the country, with the recommendation that Jacksonville might be a good place to wind up.

The story has a chance of being more than apocryphal. Many immigrants did begin life in the United States as peddlers, traveling from town to town, learning the language and earning money to provide a life for their families. And Jacksonville's balmy climate is similar to that of the regions the immigrants left behind.

Hanna J. Batteh, a Jacksonville resident for more than 30 years, began his life in this country as a traveling salesman. Batteh was born 80 years ago in Ramallah. Two of his older brothers had come to the United States and taken jobs selling rugs, linens and other household items for the Ramallah Trading Company of New York, which was operated by cousins of the Battehs. Hanna joined his brothers in 1923 and himself became a traveling salesman. Batteh said, "I've been through thirty-five states." In 1953 he said he "got tired and retired" to Jacksonville, where his brothers had already settled.

When J.K. David, Gladys Howell's father, arrived in Jacksonville in 1899 there were already 10 or 15 Arab-American families living there. Assad Sabbag, who owned a store called the New York Grocery Company, let David peddle trinkets and small wares in front of his store. Howell recalled that her father "arrived at Christmas time and was able to survive on that." Sabbag and David became partners for a time, and then David struck out on his own and founded the Duval Ice and Coal Company in 1925.

Stories like David's and Batteh's multiplied through the years. A young man from a village would be sent to the United States to work as a peddler or tradesman, saving his money to bring other members of his family to live and work in his new community.

Japour Toney told the *Times Union* that his father and two brothers worked around the clock at the Cumberland Lumber Company. They rented a room with one bed, and as each brother finished a shift he would wake the other, send him off to work, and take his turn in the bed. "The bed never did cool off," Toney said.

Around the turn of the century, many Arab-Americans still spoke Arabic and had not fully assimilated. When the Great Fire of 1901 destroyed nearly 2,400 buildings and left 10,000 homeless, Arab-Americans were among those who cleared away the mountains of debris and helped rebuild the charred remains of the city.

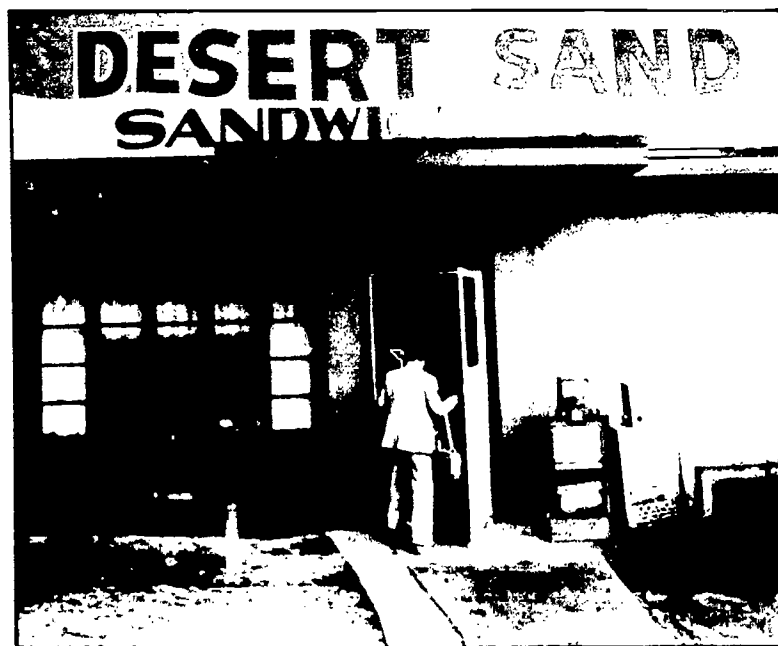
## Societies and Clubs

To promote cooperation and fellowship in the Arab-American community, to help new members adjust and to perform charitable works, the Syrian Ladies Society was established in 1910. Two years later the Syrian-American Club of Jacksonville was organized with nearly 50 charter members, according to an article in the May/June 1978 issue of *Jacksonville Magazine*. Descendents of these founders—who bore family names such as Abraham, Barket, David, Elias, Kouri, Musleh, Saba, Zahra—still contribute to every aspect of life in Jacksonville.

For the first 20 years, club members opened their meetings by singing "America the Beautiful" in Arabic. In 1927 the club moved into its first building in downtown Jacksonville, which the mayor called "the most modern building in Jacksonville." By 1932, J.K. David became a "prominent Syrian of the city and

**Sandwich shops are the bread and butter for many Lebanese and Palestinian businessmen in the Jacksonville area. The Desert Sand, pictured below, is owned by a Lebanese family.**

*Photo: Tony Teth*



## Faces of Jacksonville, continued

Elias is an active member of the Ramallah-American Club and St. George parish. She came to Jacksonville to join her sister, who had been here since 1945, so that she could earn money to bring the rest of her family to the area. When her father started a grocery business, she worked in the store for 10 years.



**Nadia Michaels (left) and Ann Duffy display handcrafts at the annual Middle Eastern festival which attracts thousands of local residents.**

"I came to this country in 1931 during the Depression, so I had to create my own job," says **Abraham Sallah**, a Ramallah-born resident of Jacksonville. First Sallah peddled door to door, then he opened up a restaurant in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1938. About a year later he moved to Macon, Georgia, where he owned simultaneously a restaurant, a grocery store and an ice cream shop.

Sallah came to Jacksonville in 1947 and

became one of the founders of the Ramallah-American Club. He opened yet another grocery store and ran it until his retirement in 1973.

How has he spent the past 11 years? "I've been doing what my wife tells me," Sallah says with a laugh. "I do odds and ends around the house, run errands at the store, visit the kids."

For **Nellie Akel**, Jacksonville has "always

been home." Her family left Jerusalem in 1947 when she was 11. They traveled first to Texas, then to Florida.

Akel married in 1954 and had four children. She and her husband spoke Arabic with their children—or at least they tried. Akel's husband was a pharmacist. He died in 1970, leaving Akel to make sure the children were educated. Akel succeeded admirably. The oldest is now an optometrist, and the others are studying law and pre-med. ■

popular among Syrians and Americans alike," according to *The Syrian World*. The weekly newspaper, the *Jacksonville American*, praised a speech delivered by J.K. David at the Syrian-American Club's 20th anniversary celebration. "Mr. David's remarks breathe the purest patriotism and devotion . . . The really significant thing to remember is that these people exemplify in their daily lives the aspirations which Mr. David has so fittingly described." The article went on to say, "America and American institutions will be forever safe at the hands of such as they."

During World War II the Syrian-American Club turned its building over to the USO and American Red Cross. In the late 1950s, the increase in immigration of Lebanese, Palestinians and Arabs of other nationalities so altered the composition of the club that its members renamed it the Salaam Club. Today, under its roof, other Arab-American groups, such as the Molaka Club, the Fahocha Club and the Syrian Ladies Auxillary, operate independently.

Arab-Americans of any national origin can join the Salaam Club. Its building, which occupies a large piece of land on Beach Boulevard, is the center of many community activities. The recreational facilities include a basketball court, tennis courts and a playground. According to one club leader, Danny Abdullah, membership now stands at between 200 and 300 families. Abdullah says the club's hall can seat 300 people for picnics and dinners. Once a month, the women make hundreds of pounds of *kibbeh heshweh* to serve at a club dinner. The skills and traditions of preparing Arabic food are passed to the younger women from their elders.

Since 1966 the club has provided scholarships to promising college-bound students. And every year the club holds a forum at which members can discuss issues with political candidates.

## From Ramallah to Jacksonville

While early Arab immigrants came from towns and villages in Syria and Lebanon—Homs, Nabek, Minyara Akkar

and Jezzine—most of the later Arab immigrants came from the Palestinian town of Ramallah. Jacksonville residents who trace their roots to Ramallah have two centers of social activity: the Ramallah-American Club and St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church. These organizations together have hosted several Arab festivals that have attracted thousands of local residents—Arab and non-Arab alike. The last festival, in October 1982, featured a three-day exhibition of the work of Arab craftsmen, artists, musicians and dancers.

St. George Church hosts parish picnics and other social events for the Orthodox community. St. George's pastor, the Reverend Father Nicholas Dahdal, proudly said, "All our traditions are kept alive." In the baptism and wedding ceremonies, "we use the same songs, same folk dances and same arrangements, with the exception of fixed marriages."

The groom at a Palestinian wedding is carried on the shoulders of the male revellers to the music of the *oud* and other Arabic instruments. The older women surround the bride and dance with swords. To an outsider, Dahdal said, this may look like a riot.

St. George parish was established in 1973, and Dahdal, himself a native of Ramallah, came to Jacksonville in 1979. Of approximately 300 families in the Orthodox community with ties to the church, Dahdal said at least half are active participants in parish activities.

The Ramallah-American Club, which is affiliated with the American Federation of Ramallah, Palestine, occupies a beautifully landscaped modern building in a quiet suburban setting. Club leader Fred Hassan estimates there are just over 200 members. Members gather for picnics, wedding receptions, community celebrations, or in small groups just to chat. Hanna Batteh occasionally joins his friends at the club to reminisce about their past in Ramallah and to play pinochle and whist. Batteh recalls the 300 *dunums* of orange groves he and his cousins worked that are now given over to other owners.

Ramallah elders talk about how to keep their cultural traditions alive. "There used to be classes to teach Arabic at the



club," Batteh said, "but after a while people lose interest. In California they teach the young ones Arabic, and in Detroit, but not here any more." He mused, "It's nice to know your language."

### Arabs from Other Lands

Jacksonville is also home to immigrants from Iraq, Jordan and Egypt. The parents of George Ossi, who runs Ossi's Apothecary, came from Mosul, Iraq. As many as 30 families in Jacksonville trace their origins to Iraq. In addition, students from all over the Arab world study at area colleges and universities. Many remain in the United States after they have completed their schooling.

Fred Hassan and John Rukab, another Ramallah Club member, are active ADC leaders in Jacksonville and are busy organizing the diverse elements of the Arab-American community into committees for media monitoring and membership recruitment. The Jacksonville community hosted a founding ADC event in 1981 featuring National Chairman James Abourezk. The Jacksonville ADC chapter held a 1982 fundraiser for Congressman Paul Findley and promoted a speaking engagement, attended by some 350 people, by noted Israeli human rights advocate Professor Israel Shahak.

**Jacksonville's Palestinian community gathers at the Ramallah American club for wedding receptions, dinners and other celebrations. The modern building is nestled in quiet Jacksonville suburbs under tall pine trees.**

Photo: Tony Toth



# The Pride of Reawakening

by Mary Ann Fay

**S**OHAM Darwish of Portland made her first trip to Lebanon in 1969, six years before the outbreak of the Civil War and 13 years before the Israeli invasion. On the apparently placid, cosmopolitan surface of Lebanese life in 1969, there was nothing to arouse Darwish's political consciousness or sharpen her awareness of herself as a woman of Arab heritage.

In Lebanon in 1969, said Darwish, she taught English, lived with English women and felt more American than Lebanese.

Then, last year, Darwish returned to Lebanon as part of her work toward a master's degree in intercultural management. For Darwish, the trip would be a turning point in her life both personally and politically.

In the Palestinian refugee camps of Beirut and southern Lebanon, Darwish worked with the women and taught English. In southern Lebanon, she returned to the villages her parents had left in 1936 when they emigrated to the United States.

At the Bourj al-Barajnah camp in Beirut, where she lived for a while, Darwish saw Lebanon through the eyes of Palestinians who, without their fighters, felt helpless and defenseless when the camp was shelled. At the Shatila camp, she saw Lebanon through the survivors of last year's massacre. In the south, where she stayed with her aunts, she saw the Lebanon of Saad Haddad and the Israeli occupiers.



# Faces of Portland

by Paul Rask and Mary Ann Fay

**K**HALIL Atiyeh, born more than 95 years ago, in the sunparched village of Amar al Husn, Syria, was one of the countless millions whose personal stories became American 20th century history. Atiyeh became an American doughboy during World War I suffered in America's Great Depression, lent a hand as a defense worker during the second World War, raised a family and lived long enough to share in the pride of seeing a cousin become Governor of the State of Oregon.

There is still a bitterness born of frustration when Atiyeh recalls leaving Beirut in 1902. His country was under the oppressive yoke of the decaying Ottoman Empire. America offered escape.

"When I put my feet on the ship in Beirut, I raised my hand up like this. I said, 'God, don't let me see this country anymore.'"

And Khalil Atiyeh never did.

He arrived at Ellis Island at the age of 12 in the company of older cousins, became part of the young country's notorious child labor force in a cigar factory in Allentown, Pennsylvania and searched out opportunity in the raw timberlands of Oregon. It was in Portland that he attended night school to learn to read and write English. He forced himself to write English with more

than an immigrant's scrawl. Today he speaks his adopted tongue with barely a trace of Arabic accent.

In 1916, jobless but imbued with American patriotic fervor, Atiyeh enlisted and was trained at Fort Slocum, New York. When the 6th Calvary was dispatched for overseas combat, Khalil Atiyeh remained in the United States. Convoluted military thinking concluded that because he had been born in Syria, then under Turkish

—Continued page 76



**The oldest member of Portland's Arab-American community, Khalil Atiyeh, 95, poses with a great grandchild. Born in Amar al Husn, Syria, Atiyeh immigrated to Oregon in 1906. Since then he has watched his countrymen write a new chapter of the Great American Story, starting from humble beginnings to where his cousin, Victor Atiyeh, rose to become Oregon's first governor of Arab descent. Still hale and vigorous, he and his wife, Aniese, continue to reside in Portland.**

Before she went to Lebanon, said Darwish, she believed she knew more about the country and the political situation than the average American. "When I got there, I realized how little I knew," she said. "My whole political awakening came out of this trip. It really changed my life."

Darwish left Lebanon in September when heavy fighting was renewed around the capital. Since she returned to Portland, she has been giving presentations to various groups about her experiences in Lebanon.

And she is determined to return to Lebanon, to live and work there and to become fluent in Arabic. "In spite of the harshness of life there," said Darwish, "there's also a warmth, a connection between people that really got to me."

## Personal Journeys

In the Arab-American community of Portland, there are others like Darwish—assimilated and integrated into mainstream American society—who have made their own personal journeys towards a rediscovery of their roots and their heritage.

For Darwish, the journey was physical. For others, the journey is a spiritual and emotional one that can begin for a variety of reasons—political events in the Middle East, an incident of anti-Arab racism or a craving for identity and roots in a rootless American society.

In Portland, as in other cities with sizeable Arab-American communities, this Arab-American re-awakening is also a product of the new wave of immigrants who brought with them a well-developed sense of Arab nationalism and an assertive pride in their heritage.

Nadia Kahl, a second-generation Arab-American, believes that the attitude of the Arab-American community has changed significantly. "They used to be ashamed. They spoke Arabic in private not in public," said Kahl. "They were afraid people would think they were gypsies or dirty Turks."

Arab immigrants began to arrive in Portland sometime in the 1890s and



## Graduation Day



Graduation from grade school was an event which many Syrian immigrants looked forward to with pride for their children, especially if the child was born in the "old country." Typical is the graduation of Aziz (Ike) Azorr. Born in Syria, he immigrated to Portland in 1920 at age six. Though he spoke no English at the time, he entered Arleta school. By the time he graduated in 1928 (3rd row from bottom, 3rd from right), Aziz had "skipped" a grade and graduated near the top of his class. Now deceased, Aziz Azorr had been a labor relations mediator for the federal government.

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## Faces of Portland, *continued*

rule, Atiyeh might be a security risk if he was sent to France. Atiyeh accepted his lot. He was assigned to the 5th Calvary Regiment at Fort Ringo, Texas until he was discharged in 1920.

The Portland Arab-American community of the early 1900s was closely knit along the lines of villages of origin. Khalil's cousins, George and Aziz Atiyeh, had already established themselves in Southeast Portland as Portland's leading oriental rug merchants. Others opened grocery stores or established peddling routes. Ten miles to the north, in

St. Johns, other Syrian and Lebanese immigrants settled.

The first social club in Portland was called the Syrian Club. Atiyeh believes it started in 1906 or 1908, but he's not really sure. He is quite certain, however, that George Atiyeh, his cousin and father of Oregon's present governor, Victor Atiyeh, was one of the founders. George was one of the few educated men in the community. He served as community banker and dispenser of advice. The club, which attracted most Arab-speaking men, met at the

—Continued page 78



The father of Oregon's present governor stands in front of his newly established store (circa 1900). George Atiyeh was one of the first Syrian immigrants to settle in Portland. He became one of the most successful merchants in the city and served as counselor and guide to the Syrians who followed him to Portland. His son, Victor, is currently in his second term as Oregon's governor, the first Arab-American to ever attain a state's highest political office.

continued to arrive in relatively large numbers until the 1920s. When the number of immigrants was reduced to a mere trickle during the 1920s, this was not because the Arabs already there did not want to bring over family members they had left behind or that their family members did not want to join them. Restrictive laws attempted to preserve the ethnic homogeneity of American society and were directed primarily against immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The drastic reduction in immigration coupled with the generally intolerant attitude of Americans towards ethnic and racial minorities threw the Arab-American community back upon itself, hastened assimilation and caused a decline in spoken Arabic and the Arabic press. Kahl, whose parents left Syria in 1950 and whose brother Sami Jr. was born there, remembers an incident in the life of her family that is illustrative of the prevailing attitude towards ethnicity and the desire of hyphenated Americans to preserve their heritage.

Kahl's parents spoke Arabic at home and because her older brother could not speak English well, he was held back a year in school. "The teacher told my parents never to speak Arabic to us, only English. So, they stopped speaking Arabic to us," she said. "My father wanted to protest but my mother said the teacher must know what's best."

As a student at Portland State University, said Kahl, she was classed with the foreign students even though she was born in the United States.

## A New Generation

Immigrants trickled in over the years, with the largest wave coming after 1965 when immigration laws were revised. This new wave coincided with the black civil rights movement, which was making Americans generally more tolerant of ethnic and racial diversity.

The new generation of immigrants is proud not ashamed of its heritage, said Kahl, and this has had a spill-over effect on the community as a whole. In addition,

said Kahl, their arrival increased the size of the community and ended its sense of isolation.

"Before the 1960s, the community was small," said Kahl. "It's much easier to be proud of your background if you're not alone."

In Kahl's opinion, the re-awakened ethnic pride of the community and its heightened political consciousness have had some negative as well as positive effects. For one thing, said Kahl, she has seen a decline in activism in institutions like the Arab-American Community Center.

"When the community was small we had to cling to each other. We didn't have anyone else," said Kahl. "This is probably why the community was so close and so active. When you're in small numbers and you don't have your family, you need a

club to make you feel like you belong."

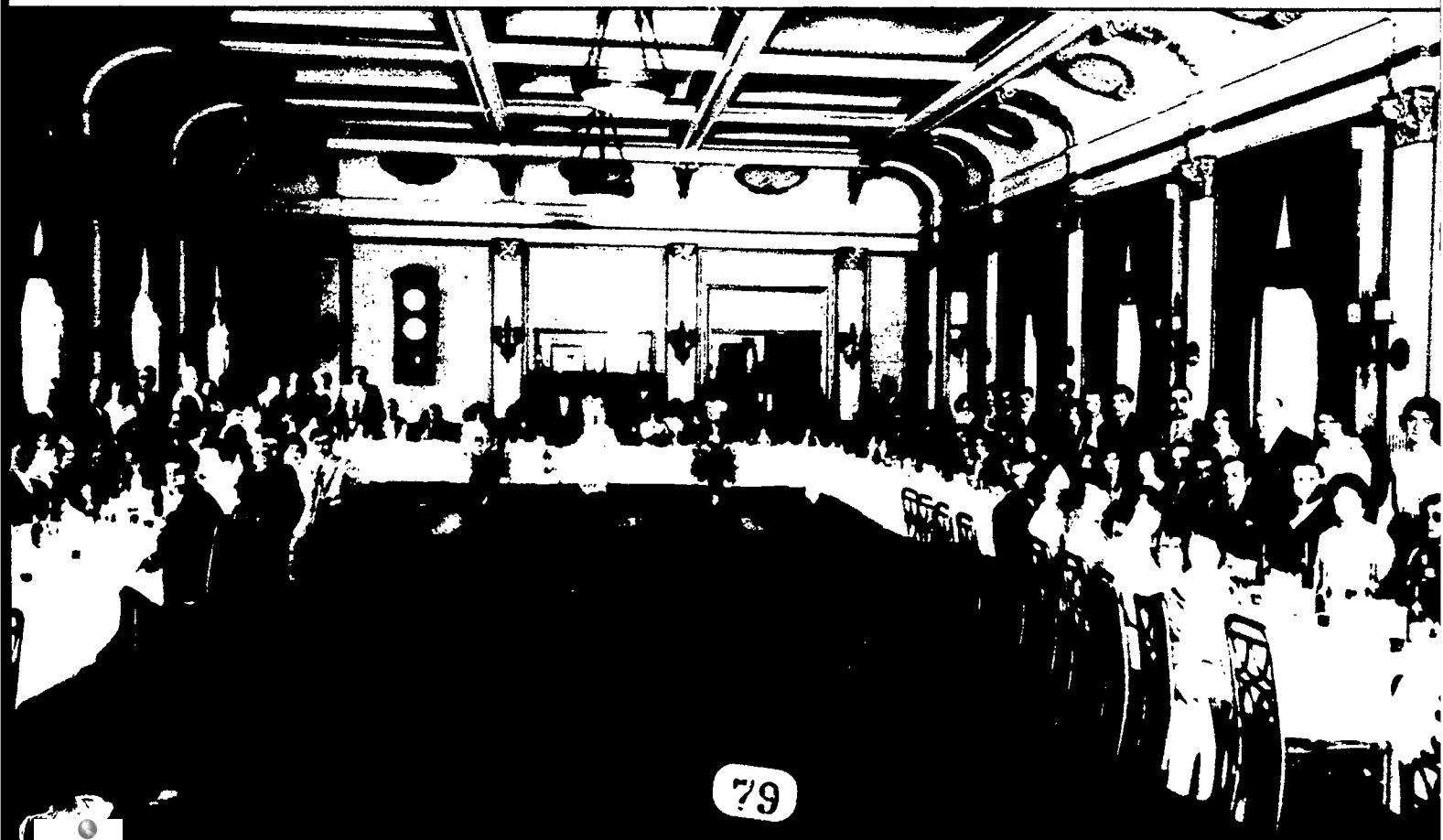
For another thing, said Kahl, the community's heightened political consciousness has sharpened political divisions, particularly between the city's Syrian and Maronite communities.

Kahl, who is 30, said she has been active in the Arab-American community since she was 12. She believes her activism is due to the importance her parents attached to preserving the family's cultural heritage and to being involved in the community.

Paul Rask, a third-generation Arab-American, is another community activist who is president of the Arab-American Community Center and co-ordinator of the metropolitan Portland ADC chapter. Rask's family settled in Butte, Montana in the 1890s because at that time, said Rask, Butte was a boom-town of about

**The first really high-society affair for the Portland Arab-American community was the 1931 wedding of Robert A. Bitar to Mabel Asmar. Bitar has been honorary consul for Lebanon in Portland for more than 25 years. Though semi-retired from his**

**property management business, he and Mrs. Bitar still preside over some of Portland's most publicized social events. The wedding banquet pictured here was in the historic Portland Hotel.**



## Faces of Portland, *continued*

house of each member every two weeks. Each successive meeting site was selected in alphabetical order.

Today, the club has gone through a metamorphosis. After World War II, it was known as the Syrian-Lebanese-American Club. Today, it is called the Arab-American Community Center and Atiyeh approves of the new name, for immigrants from Syria and Lebanon no longer make up the entire fabric of Portland's Arab community. There are others from Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

**Atiyeh and Aniese Haddad**, who also came from his village, were married in 1928 in Cuba. Except for a brief time in Allentown, Pa. where the Depression of the 1930s shut the doors of employment, he and his wife returned to Portland, where both of them still reside, healthy and vigorous.

Daily they can be seen, walking briskly together to the supermarket, several blocks away. Their two freezers are always brimming with Arabic food prepared by both of them, ready at an instant whenever their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren or other guests drop in.

They have been honored guests at Governor Atiyeh's two inaugurations. When the governor's busy schedule

permits, he stops in at their modest bungalow and pays his respects.

Today, the community in Portland includes second and third generation Arab-Americans like **Richard Unis**, the first Arab-American to become a judge in Oregon, as well as a new first generation of Arab-Americans like **Farida Derhalli**, a businesswoman and president of the state's United Nations Association.

Unis is the son of a Bohemian mother and a Lebanese father who was 14 years old when he came to the United States in 1912 with his grandfather. Only six months after their arrival in Salt Lake City, the grandfather died. Probably by falsifying his age, Unis suspects, his father joined the army during World War I and became a U.S. citizen.

When he was growing up, said Unis, the Arab-American Portland was so small it could fit into one of the local parks for a picnic. The community was also struggling to survive, especially during the hard times of the Depression.

"All of us were taught to work hard," said Unis. To support his family, Unis' father worked as a ditch-digger and in restaurants and eventually became a construction foreman. Unis himself worked his way through seven years of college and law school at Portland State University.

Unis was the first Lebanese-American to be admitted to the bar in Oregon and to become a judge. He has been on the

100,000 people. Another part of the family moved to Portland in the 1940s.

According to Rask, the original Arab-American immigrants arrived in Portland in the 1890s from Syria. One of the first was George Atiyeh, father of the state's governor, Victor.

George Atiyeh was the brother of Aziz Elias Atiyeh, the first person to leave the village of Amar in Syria for the United States. Aziz Atiyeh arrived in Allentown, Pa. in 1895 and others from the village, including his brother, George, soon followed him. Eventually, however, George left Allentown and settled in Portland.

The village of Amar is one of 30 or so in Syria's Christian Valley north of the Lebanese border. Dominating the hills overlooking the valley is the centuries-old French Crusader castle, the *Kark des Chevaliers*.

After several centuries of relative isolation that allowed the villagers to practice their religion in peace, the village was penetrated by the outside world in the form of missionaries of the American Presbyterian Church. The missionaries, who arrived in the 1890s, offered the villagers a Western-style education and tales of a different and more prosperous way of life across the seas. Today, there are more men and women in the U.S. and South America who can trace their roots back to Amar than there are in the village.

## Rich Community Life

The community that the first generation of Arab immigrants built in Portland today numbers about 7,000 in the metropolitan area, including Vancouver, Washington. A few of the original immigrants, like Halil Atiyeh, have lived to see their hard work and willingness to sacrifice for the next generation crowned with success because Portland's Arab-American community is predominantly middle-class, prosperous and professional.

Portland's Arab-American community has given the state its Republican governor, Victor Atiyeh, and the city two circuit court judges, Phillip Abraham and

—Continued next page

Richard Unis. The community also includes a member of the State Racing Commission, Sami Kahl; his daughter, Nadia, the Arab-American community's co-ordinator for Folkfest of Portland, Inc., an umbrella organization of 60 ethnic groups; Farida Derhalli, president of the Oregon Chapter of the United Nations; prominent businessman Daniel J. Hanna, owner of Hanna Car Wash Industries; and Dr. Nohad Toulou, dean of Urban Studies and Development at Portland State University. Dr. Toulou has been appointed co-ordinator of an international team of experts developing a master plan for the Muslim holy city of Mecca.

About 80 percent of the Arab-American community traces its origins to Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and the remainder to Egypt, Iraq and Libya. The community also includes between 400 and 500 students at Portland State University.

There are two mosques in Portland and three Christian denominations—Syrian Orthodox, Maronite and Syriac. The Orthodox community worships at St. George Antiochian Church and the Maronite at St. Sharbell's. The Syrian community at present does not have a church building or a priest.

The heart of the Arab-American community's cultural life is the Arab-American Community Center, formerly the Syrian Club and then the Syrian-Lebanese Club. Some of the center's members are intensely interested in preserving the traditions of the homeland, said Rask, while others are "totally Yankee."

In addition, the Arab-American community has participated in Folkfest since its inception in 1975. According to Kahl, Folkfest began as an ethnic festival to celebrate the country's Bicentennial. The first festival occurred in 1976 and Folkfest has continued ever since.

Although Portland shares many of the characteristics of other Arab-American communities—predominantly Christian, predominantly Syrian and Lebanese, middle-class and professional—it would be erroneous to describe it as typical. As Paul Rask said when describing Portland's Arab-American community, "It is as diverse as America."

## Faces of Portland, *continued*

bench for 17 years as a municipal, district and circuit court judge.

Farida Derhalli, the daughter of a Palestinian father from Jaffa, grew up in Ramallah and has been in Portland since 1969. Derhalli was educated in

Derhalli is the mother of two sons, one a landscape architect in Muncie, Indiana and another a pre-dentistry student at Oregon State University, and a daughter who is married and living in Bahrain. Active in the Portland community, Derhalli is the president of the U.N. Association, served for two years on the World



**The home of Charles (Khalil) and Mary Isaacs (circa 1912), perhaps following the baptisms of their three sons, the youngsters in white. The Isaacs immigrated to the U.S. from Amar al Husn, Syria near the turn of the century, and lived in Allentown, Pa. for a decade before moving to Portland. Their home had been open to young Syrian men, newly arrived in the community, who boarded there until they found work, obtained their own lodgings or married.**

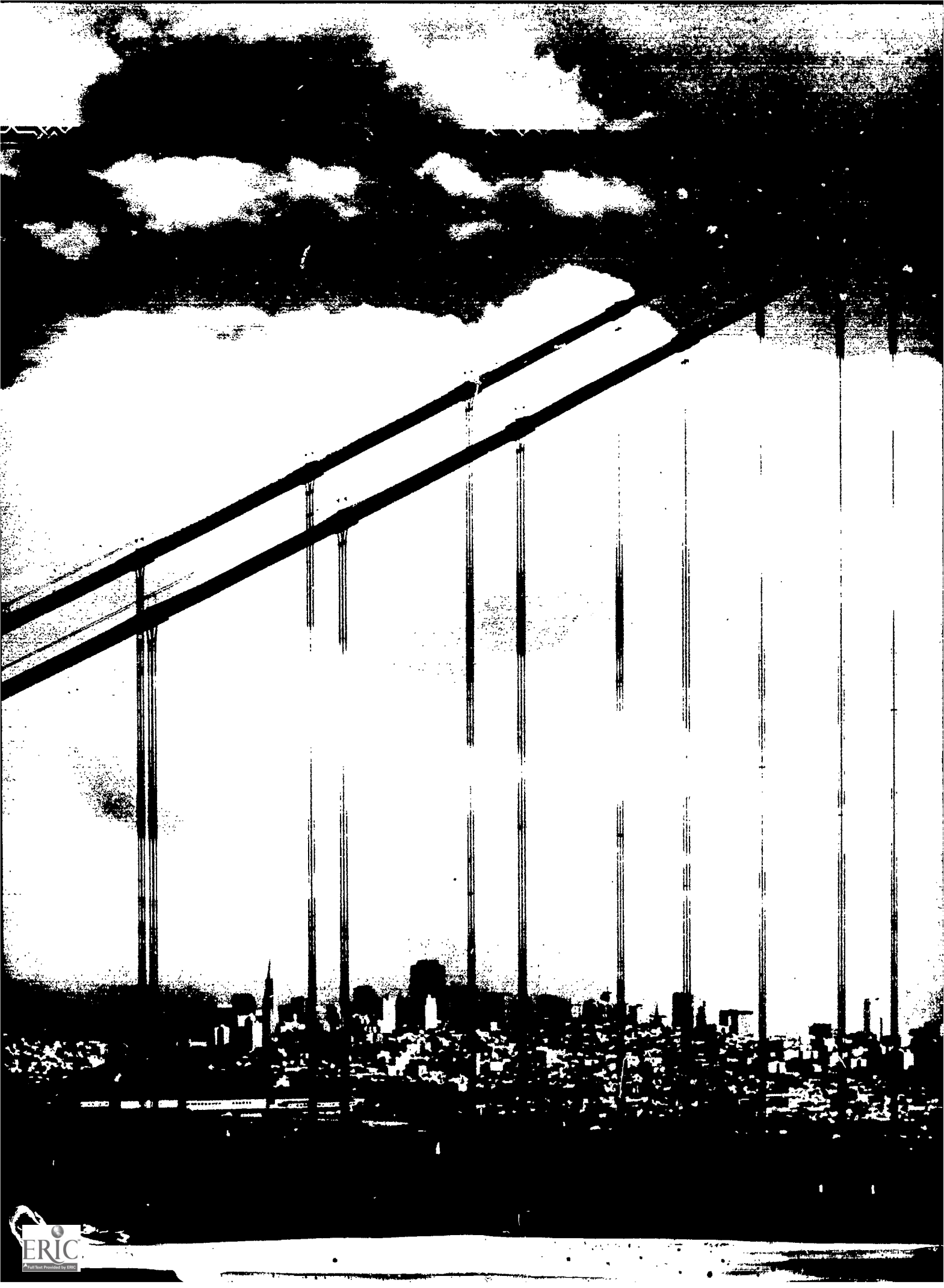
Europe and the United States and spent 15 years working for American and international companies in Kuwait and other countries in the Middle East as a marketing specialist.

This year, Derhalli will see one of her dreams come true when she opens the boutique she has named "The Penniless Aristocrat." "It's been the dream of my life," said Derhalli. "I've been working for others for so long."

Affairs Council and has worked with the local Council of Churches.

As a professional woman and a community activist, Derhalli has encountered some difficulties. "Being a professional is difficult for all women," said Derhalli. "As an active, involved woman, it's harder in Arab-American circles because they expect me not to speak out. But I think I have gained their respect."







# Arab Culture in the Bay Area

By Randa Sifri

**W**ITH a climate similar to the Mediterranean countries, San Francisco has been attracting Arabs since the early 1900's. Many came directly from the Middle East, but a large number have moved from Detroit, New York, and Canada in search of jobs. The community is growing rapidly and now nears 40,000. Although the immigration patterns among the different nationalities are similar, certain groups predominate in the Bay Area.

As with most Arab communities in the United States, the Syrian-Lebanese were the pioneers. Lebanese Maronites are reported to have arrived in Oakland in 1906-1907, and once they were settled, relatives and fellow villagers soon followed. They came as merchants and peddlers, and were quick to set up businesses on their new land. Many continued the orange-growing traditions they had left in the Middle East. This first wave of immigration, which included Orthodox and Melkites as well as a few Palestinians, lasted until the early 1920s.

The inter-war period did not bring a change in the Arab-American community. It was not until post-WWII that the second major wave was to begin. Primarily since 1948 and 1967, the Bay Area has witnessed an influx of another Arab group, the Palestinians. Fleeing political persecution at home, many Palestinians came to seek an education or simply to improve their lives. Today their

## Faces of San Francisco

**M**AY "Nebby" Stephen spent most of her life on the East Coast and did not come to the San Francisco Bay Area until 1970. May's mother is Syrian and her father is Lebanese. She grew up in Manchester, N.H. Although she fondly remembers her Manchester home as a "Grand Central Station that was open to any Arab who needed help," May's dedication to her work did not leave time to become active in the Arab-American community. She received her undergraduate degree in sociology and psychology from the University of North Carolina.

After doing some graduate work in Chicago, she moved to Washington, DC, where she married and bore five children. She worked for the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development until 1970. May was working for the NICHD during the 1967 War, and remembers hearing anti-Arab remarks. It was at that time she "became an instant Arab."

May's many accomplishments resulted in a job at the Stanford Research Institute, where she worked for ten years as the Senior Social Psychologist. She also became involved in the Palestine Human Rights Campaign while in Palo Alto, and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. May is now retired.

82 She enjoys poetry and

continues her work for the Arab-American community.

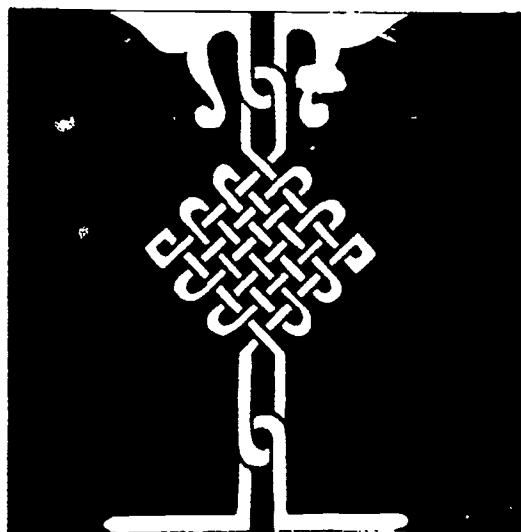
Born in Dahour-Chware, Lebanon, **Father Paul Muawwad** came to the United States in 1962 as a student. He received his degree in theology from Catholic University in 1970 and set out for Portland, Oregon, to establish missions for the Maronite community. Within seven years, Fr. Paul was not only successful in starting a church in Portland, he also established churches in Seattle and Utah and started missions in San Jose, Stockton and Las Vegas.

After arriving in San Francisco in 1978, he became involved in the Arab-American community and established Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Milbrae in 1981. Fr. Paul's open personality attracted worshipers of other denominations to his parish. He has since left San Francisco and is now the pastor of St. George in Rhode Island. Though he has been in Rhode Island since August 1983, he says there is no place in the world like San Francisco. "The people are great," he laughs. "I really did leave my heart in San Francisco."

**Ali Saleh** came to the United States in the 1950s for an education. A North Yemeni, he arrived in Los Angeles in 1954 and worked his way through school. After receiving his bachelor's degree in vocational and

occupations vary. They are professionals and they are laborers. Many have entered business, evidence being the vast number of Palestinian grocers in the Bay Area. Numbering near 20,000, the Palestinians comprise over 50-percent of the Arab-American community, with almost 30 percent of these Palestinians coming from Ramallah alone.

During the 1960s, the Assyrians and Yemenis also began establishing the roots



of their communities. Whereas the Syrian-Lebanese and the Palestinians are located all over the Bay Area, the Assyrians are concentrated largely in Turlock and Modesto, 100 miles east of San Francisco. The first settlers immigrated in 1914, but it was the later wave of immigration that increased their numbers to the 10,000 they are today. Turlock and Modesto are agriculture areas, and consequently Assyrians went into farming. Now, many are in blue- and white-collar jobs and are entering into business. Sam Lazar, an Assyrian from Iraq, has noticed a drop in immigration since the Iran-Iraq War: "Now Assyrians are coming only by way of Europe," he says.

Immigration laws have affected the Yemenis as well, but they still maintain a significant community. Coming mostly from North Yemen in the late 1960s and 1970s, they today number near 2,000.

—Continued page 84

The first Yemenis came from Detroit and Buffalo, but during the Vietnam War, many came on ships that landed in the San Francisco port. Initially, they were farmers, but as their English improved, many began to open grocery stores. In East Bay alone, there are now nearly 200 Yemeni grocers. Though at first many came alone with the intention of returning to Yemen, more and more are settling here and bringing their families.

Although noticeably smaller than the other Arab nationalities, the Egyptian population is increasing. Siham el-Din has been in the Bay Area since the early 1960's, when her husband was the Egyptian consul. "I don't remember there being many Egyptians back then," she says. "But the numbers have increased dramatically in recent years." The majority of Egyptians are professionals, and though not geographically isolated in one spot, many can be found in San Mateo and San Jose.

Despite the differences in size and immigration patterns, the Arab nationalities share many of the same traits and ideas. They are hard-working and envision America as a place where their dreams can be realized. Their children intermarry with other Americans and though assimilation is becoming a way of life, there is still an appreciation of Arabic music, tabouleh, and hummus. Samir Amis imports, one of the largest Middle Eastern stores in the Bay Area, had to expand in 1972 to accommodate the desires of the community. Americans do frequent his store but Samir Khoury says 90 percent of the clientele are Arabs or Arab-Americans.

### United by culture

Nightclubs like the Casbah, Pasha and Baghdad also cater to Arab-Americans. Started in 1969 by Kamal Ayoub and Fadil Shahin, the Casbah provides live Arabic entertainment for the mixed Arab and American audiences. In any one night, a Lebanese businessman might meet an Egyptian doctor, a Palestinian poet, or an Armenian-Lebanese couple.

# Yemeni Arabs as Farmworkers

by Jack Matalka

**E**VERY year from mid-July to late November, some 7,000 Yemeni Arabs join the migrant farmworkers labor force in central California's lush San Joaquin valley to perform the tedious work of hand-picking 700,000 acres of ripening table grapes.

The task is vital to the economy of the fertile valley, which has a unique geographic location and a mild climate that enables growers to produce multiple harvests of wine and table grapes. Machines perform the bulk of the harvesting in the winery vineyards, but the delicate table grapes require the gentler touch of human hands.

The Yemeni Arab workers are young men who come to the United States with dreams, hopes, a suitcase, no money and a piece of paper that tells them where to go when immigration has finished with them. Many cannot speak, read or write English, but they have mastered the art of signing their names—which they readily do.

The workers know whom to report to and when. They are part of a society that is organized and well-informed. Information travels quickly between the different camps where the workers reside.

The camps are scattered all over the San Joaquin Valley, and are usually located on the grape grower's property. A typical camp houses approximately 100 farmworkers and contains a central kitchen and a central bath house. Some camps have a TV room and some have separate sleeping quarters. A foreman usually manages the camp and assumes responsibility for order.

Yemeni farmworkers' industry and skill are much in demand by growers in the area. They also value the Yemenis' willingness to live on the property, which provides the grower a readily accessible work force that responds on demand. The Yemeni Arab works an eight-hour day, six days a week, with Sundays off. During picking and packing season the workers are paid \$4.90 an hour plus a 30 cents per box bonus. The season runs from July through November.

In 1975, California passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) to protect agricultural workers' rights to be represented by a labor union. The United Farm Workers, long a force in the area, became dominant. The UFW was, in turn, dominated by Hispanics,

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## Faces of San Francisco, *continued*

technical education at San Francisco State University, he went on for a master's in Education Administration. He teaches at Chabot College in Hayward, California, and is a general sales agent for Yemeni Airways.

Ali is respected for his optimism and unwavering devotion to the Arab-American community in the Bay area. He is the former president of both the Association of Arab-American University Graduates and the Yemeni Association, and is currently the president-elect of the Arab Cultural Center. Before the weekend school was shut down because of a lack of funds, Ali helped teach Arabic to children. Father of two children, he feels it is important that the Arab heritage is continued in successive generations. Though most of his family is in the United States, Ali still returns to North Yemen periodically to visit his parents and maintain his roots there.

Though he grew up in Canada, **Bill Ezzy** describes himself as an American. His parents came to Canada from Syria in the early 1900s, but the poor economic conditions there led Bill to come to San Francisco after he finished school. After four years in the Navy, he went to work for the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps where he remained for ten years. He then went to work for the General Services Administration as a Quality Control Representative.

Fulfilling his dream of marrying "a nice Arab girl" in 1948, he now boasts two grown daughters. Bill established the San Francisco chapter of NAAA in 1979, and since that time has been chairman of all five of their major events.

Retired after 30 years of service, he devotes most of his time to the Arab-American community. He is also active in the Press Club and the Commonwealth Club of California. Asked why he spends so much time with those organizations, he quoted Abraham Lincoln: "If you observe a wrong, you have an obligation to correct that wrong."

**Fuad Ateyeh** is one of over 500 Arab grocers in the Bay area. Born in Jerusalem, he came to the United States in 1969. Although the American culture and language was a shock, Fuad adapted quickly and worked his way through four years at San Francisco State University. He was able to maintain his grocery store, which he started from scratch, at the same time he was completing his master's degree in business in 1978. From 1980 to 1983, Fuad served as president of the Independent Grocers Association—an organization that protects the interests of the store owners. He also teaches Business Management at the City College of San Francisco. Over the years he has come to feel much more comfortable with American customs. When he is not working, Fuad enjoys spending time with his wife, also a Palestinian, and his six-month-old daughter. ■

The Arab Cultural Center was set up in the middle 1970s to unite all Arab-Americans. The idea has met with varied results. Because of the wide range of political ideologies and social backgrounds among Arab-Americans, efforts to consolidate the community are not always successful. Instead, there is a tendency toward separate social organizations. The oldest is the American Syrian-Lebanese Club, and over the years groups such as the Ramallah Club, the Yemeni Association, the Assyrian Civic Club, and the Beit Hanina club have formed.

Still, some events, like Palestine Day, which is held annually in Golden Gate Park, attract a diversity of Arab-Americans, and charitable and academic organizations appeal to wide audiences. NAJDA has been meeting for many years and is made up of Arab and American women of all backgrounds. Schools for children also allow crossing of ethnic boundaries. The Weekend School in East Bay has been teaching Arabic to Arab-American children for years.

"The best way to bring Arab-Americans together is through the arts," says Samir Haddad, a Jordanian immigrant to San Francisco. By de-emphasizing the political and strengthening the cultural, he feels, the community can become united. Samir, who recently made a film on the Arabs in San Francisco, says there are not enough Arab-American musicians, dancers and singers in the United States. "By becoming more involved in the arts, not only will we increase the visibility of our people, we will find commonalities that bring us together and make us proud to be Americans." Samir recalls a theatrical presentation put on through the Arab Cultural Center in 1980 to celebrate the pre-Islamic festival, *Souq Okas*, with a night of poetry, music and fashion which drew a crowd of over 600 people.

The founder and motivating force of the NAAA in San Francisco, Bill Ezzy, feels the potential of the Arab-American community lies in the children and grandchildren of the immigrants. "There have to be groups that attract the young or the heritage will be lost." Osama Doumani, head of the ADC regional

office in San Francisco, agreed with the necessity for further cooperation among the various groups. May Stephen, an active ADC member, stressed that it is the young who break down the barriers. "We need to stick together," she says, "because if we stand separate it's much easier to knock us down."

## Beyond Old Stereotypes

Recently, the Arab-American community has become involved in local politics, after an unfortunate incident almost five years ago. In 1979, an Arab-American, George Corey, was running for Congress in San Mateo. As part of his campaign, he attended an Arab-American reception held in his honor. The next day, the local news media began an assault on his character, and he was labelled a P.L.O. sympathizer because of his association with Arabs. Michael Nabti, Director of the Arab Information Center in the Bay Area, thinks Arab-Americans need to learn to be political activists. "We need to learn how to organize, campaign and do grass-roots work before we can become available political force."

Most of the religious institutions for Arab-Americans have social and youth clubs that serve their communities. Orthodox churches in the area include St. Nicholas in San Francisco, St. John in East Bay, and Church of the Redeemer in Los Altos. The Maronite church in Milbrae, Our Lady of Lebanon, was established by Fr. Paul Muawwad in 1981, and attracts some Melkites and Orthodox. To serve the Assyrian community, there are Chaldean churches and Churches of the East in Turlock and San Jose. Muslim Arabs, particularly the Yemenis, attend the Islamic Center in downtown San Francisco.

Arab-Americans in the Bay Area have had to work hard to get where they are, and there is still a fight against discrimination. May Stephen has noticed that violent anti-Arab sentiment is no longer obvious, and that like many other minorities in the area, Arab-Americans are no longer made to feel ashamed of their differences. ■

## Yemeni Arabs, *continued*

most of them from Mexico.

The Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB), established under the ALRA, employed large numbers of Spanish-speaking personnel to assist Hispanic laborers. Not so for Yemeni laborers and others so the Arabs and

they were able to provide translation, transportation and mediation. In 1983, ADC expanded its services to include various forms of insurance, lobbying at the state capital in Sacramento, and reduced air fare to Yemen. As a result of ADC efforts, ALRB has hired qualified Arabic-speaking personnel to assist the farmworkers.



other minorities remained ignorant of their rights since they could not understand the English language explanations offered by ALRB staff.

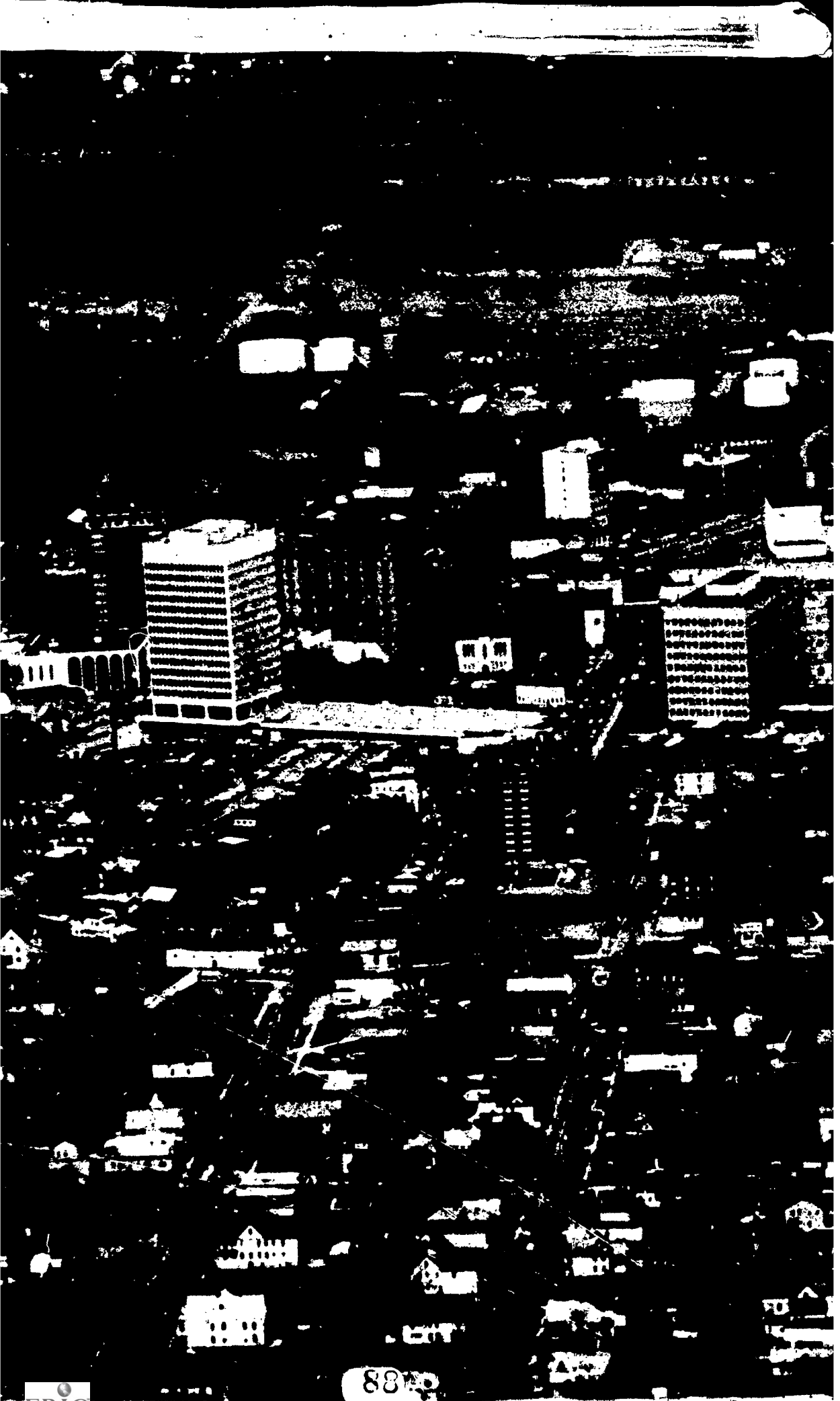
In 1981, ADC opened an office in Bakersfield to assist the Yemeni farmworkers in the dealings with the UFW and to rectify some of the inequities in the receipt of services from such government agencies as the Employment Development Department, Social Security Administration, Fair Employment and Housing Department, medical clinics and the ALRB itself.

In 1982, ADC moved its offices to Delano, where

A large number of Yemeni Arab workers are merchants at heart, and work and save to achieve the ultimate success, which is to own and operate a market in any town in the U.S. Because they did not have access to the upward mobility available to Hispanics through the UFW, the Yemenis chose an urban route to success, and within the last decade some 43 grocery stores have sprung up in Bakersfield alone—all of them owned by Yemeni Arabs who got their start in this country as farmworkers. ■

Jack Matalka, an employee of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board since 1975, was an organizing member of ADC in the San Joaquin Valley.







# Mt. Lebanon to the Mohawk Valley

**W**HEN Anthony Shaheen, a Republican attorney of Lebanese descent, was elected a New York State Supreme Court Justice last November, it was a source of pleasure but not surprise to many in the Utica Arab-American community.

"We went all out for him," commented a member of that community, a Democrat.

"It was about time," commented a Republican. "I'm not surprised. You know, this could serve as an example to the younger ones coming up."

Shaheen's election is a thread that ties together several strands of life for Americans of Arabic descent in the small Mohawk Valley city, which has about 130,000 residents in the metropolitan area. About 5,000 of them are of Lebanese and Syrian descent.

In just a couple of generations, the Syrian/Lebanese community of Utica has moved from the status of immigrants to assimilation into American society, economic success, and acceptance by their fellow citizens. Since the achievement of integration there is also a resurgence of ethnic pride.

One fact stands out about Utica's Arab-Americans: they have succeeded in business, the professions, government service, white collar employment and agriculture.

The greatest part of the migration from the Middle East—mostly from

## Faces of Utica

**B**ENEDICT Koury is a retired farmer. A first generation Lebanese, Koury ran a 1,000-acre farm in the Utica area with two brothers. His primary crop was beans.

The farm was started by his father, and Koury and his brothers took it over in 1930. He also was on the Executive Committee of the Oneida County Republican Committee. Since retirement, he spends winters in Florida, where "I play a little golf and go to the track once in a while." Today, a third generation of Kourys, William and George III, take an active role in the farming business.

**Edward George**, first generation Lebanese, started the first Lebanese pharmacy in Utica in 1930. He now runs George's Pharmacy with his son, Edward.

He received his Pharmacy degree from the University of Buffalo in 1927. "I started out to be a doctor, but couldn't afford it," he said. For many years, George's Pharmacy was located next door to the office of **Dr. Brahim Mandour**, one of Utica's first Lebanese physicians. Dr. Mandour passed away recently after 40 years of practicing medicine in Utica.

The Chanatrys represent a prominent Syrian family that has become well-known in business and the professions. **Dr. Joseph Chanatry**, a gynecologist, graduated valedictorian from Proctor High School in East Utica and has long been active in civic affairs—serving as chairman of the Utica Charter Reform Commission in 1975.

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Lebanon—to the Mohawk Valley occurred in the first half of the 20th century, with most coming in the 1920s and 1930s. However, there is a reference to a Syrian mass performed in St. John's Roman Catholic Church in 1882, hinting at earlier immigrants whose history has nearly been erased from memory.

The earliest record of Syrian-Lebanese names in the Utica City Directory was 1895, when two businessmen were listed as living and working on Bleecker St., once a center of Arab immigrant culture. Today, there are large concentrations in the Capron section of Utica, a former suburb annexed to the city earlier in the century, and in Clark Mills, a village about five miles from Utica.

Like many new arrivals to America, these people thrived on hard work, thrift and family cooperation. Many of the first group worked in the textile industry, one resident recalls. He is proud of their contribution to what he boasts of as "once the textile capital of the world."

But usually they only worked in the mills long enough to accumulate enough capital to start a business or purchase a farm. Brothers often went into business or farming together, a tradition that persists.

### Tradition of Hard Work

The attraction to business reflects a mercantile tradition that goes back centuries to the Phoenician sea traders and Armenian caravan traders of the Mount Lebanon area, according to a book by John Moses, *From Mount Lebanon to the Mohawk Valley: The Story of Syro-Lebanese Americans in the Utica Area*.

Often, the new Americans would work in a factory until they earned enough money to become peddlers or other businessmen. From these painfully acquired savings, they were able to establish permanent businesses—groceries, restaurants, bakeries, jewelry stores, and dry goods stores, to name a few.

A substantial number of Lebanese entered agriculture. At one time, they owned 48 farms in the Utica area, Moses



At George's Pharmacy, a long tradition of service to the community is passed from father to son. Edward George and Edward George, Jr., share the work at George's Pharmacy.

reported. Interestingly, war victim Hanan Saleh and her father, Sami, flew into Utica in early 1983 from nearby Syracuse, both were reported to have looked down and said that the area looked just like northern Lebanon. That stretch of land is filled with farms owned by Kourys, Acees, Abdellas, and other families who hail from the village of Akkar.

One woman, a first generation Lebanese-American, who lives in Clark Mills, described life on the farm where she grew up.

"It was run by my father and uncles," she said. "We all lived together in a complex. The boys had a dormitory on the third floor; the girls had a dormitory on the first floor."

Everything was done as a family, she said, including the celebration of holidays, such as Christmas.

"The children would visit the oldest uncle first, and then the next oldest," she explained. "But it was always as a family, never as individuals."

In her family, Christmas also was marked by a "large, festive dinner of Lebanese food."

The family tradition persists in the economic life of the Syrian-Lebanese American community in Utica, with relatives continuing to own businesses together and passing them on to their children.

One first generation man started the first pharmacy operated by an Arab-American in 1930. His son now works in the pharmacy as well.

The combination business-profession of pharmacy represents a turning in the economic life of Arab-Americans in the Mohawk Valley area.

The number of businesses peaked in 1940, with more than 110 listed in the City Directory, of whom 66 were grocers. By 1980, the number had dropped to 70, with only 26 grocers.

The hard work and thrift of the immigrant and first generation provided the means to provide their children with the education necessary to enter the professions.

Until 1925, the only Syrian-Lebanese professionals in Utica were clergyman. In

that year, a dentist and heating engineer entered the professions. By 1940, the list of professionals increased to 11, but growth took off after World War II, according to Moses. By 1981, the number of professionals had reached 95, including 24 educators, 14 physicians and surgeons, 11 attorneys, 10 dentists, 10 scientists and engineers, 6 accountants, 5 nurses, 3 clergymen, 3 social workers, 3 artists, 2 podiatrists, a psychologist, and a chiropractor.

## Bridges to the Past

One of the most predominant and persistent Arab-American traditions is food. Restaurants serving traditional Lebanese fare (*tabouleh*, *kibbee meshweh*, and *baklawas*) cater to the entire community. But even the restaurants reflect the increase and decrease of ethnic businesses—10 Middle Eastern restaurants in 1940; 4 in 1981, according to Moses.

The oldest restaurant-bakery is run by the Barady family. Charles Barady, Jr. ("Butch" to the many friends and patrons), and his wife Donna, provide residents, stores, and restaurants with Middle Eastern bread and specialties—a tradition that began in 1946 when Charles Barady, Sr. established the business. That first bakery was located on Third Avenue, in the heart of the "old neighborhood." Much of the old section was leveled and modernized by urban renewal in the 1950s. Barady's is now conveniently located across the street from St. Louis Gonzaga Church.

It stands as a bridge with the past—along with Sfeir's meat market, which specializes in lamb cuts. Gone is the Third Avenue "kah-wee" (coffee shop), where men played cards and talked politics. Gone also is the ULA (United Lebanese Association) building which housed Utica's social club for the early Lebanese.

The churches have provided an important source of cohesion and culture for Syrian-Lebanese Americans in the Utica area. Church rolls show that there are 3600 Maronite Catholics, 1200 Melkite Catholics, and 200 Antiochian

## Faces of Utica, continued

**Dr. Francis Chanatry**, a surgeon, serves on the board of St. Luke's Memorial Hospital, and played a key role in treating Hanan Saleh. Chanatry Brothers markets are the largest of the many AA supermarkets in the Utica area. The family has distinguished itself in business and medicine, and has members who are engineers, educators, artists, and social workers.

**Ellen Acee Romanus** grew up on the family farm run by her father and two uncles near Clark Mills. A first generation Lebanese, Mrs. Romanus owned and operated a restaurant in New York Mills for eight years.

Now retired, she has both children and grandchildren. Though a member of St. Louis Gonzaga Church, she attends the Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation in Clark Mills.

**Elias (Louis) Saber** immigrated from Lebanon

to Utica in 1971. He came to the United States to visit a brother, and stayed when broke out in Lebanon.

Saber teaches the dance troupe of St. Louis Gonzaga Church and works for Joseph and Price, a company that makes sports jackets. He helped start the dance troupe, he said, "to help the kids know something about Lebanon."

**Robert Joseph**, a second generation Lebanese, lives in the Capron, a mostly Lebanese, section of Utica. He has taught at the New York State School for the Deaf in Rome, NY, for 14 years. He graduated from Hamilton College with a bachelor of arts degree.

Joseph is active in the Maronite Church, the American Lebanese League, and the ADC. He is also a member of the National Apostolate Maronites, a secular arm of the church, where he teaches Sunday school. He served as a committeeman for the Democratic Party for a number of years and likes "fishing, skating—outdoor type of stuff."



Photo: Leo F. Hobeica

**Charles and Donna Barady's Syrian-Lebanese Bakery and Restaurant flourishes in Utica's well-established Arab-American community.**

Orthodox. Members of each of these churches first conducted their worship services in Roman Catholic churches in the city. But over the years, each congregation built its own church, and the Maronites and Melkites built a second church when they outgrew the first structures.

The largest church, St. Louis Gonzaga, will commemorate its 75th anniversary in 1985. At the same time, members will celebrate 50 years in its current location. The church building was completed in 1935—the result of a massive volunteer effort by church members. Many of the hardy immigrants laid the bricks and sawed the boards on Saturdays and evenings in the early 1930s. Today, it is common to hear Lebanese residents say with pride: "My father built the church." Indeed, Monsignor Francis Lahoud, the pastor, himself cut the marble for the altar.

Recently, Monsignor Julien Eliane, pastor of St. Basil Melkite Church, celebrated his fortieth anniversary as a priest.

Culturally, a dance troupe of 8 to 14-year-old children has been formed by the Maronite church to acquaint young people with their traditions. The group's teacher says dancing was important in the annual festivals that were held in Lebanon for centuries. Interestingly, there was a theater group in Lebanon around 1920 that performed both native Arabic plays and Shakespearean tragedies in Arabic translation. The plays were directed by Brahim R. Salamey who for years also served as Oneida County's court interpreter for newly arrived Lebanese and Syrians. Today, several pictures of the players in costume are treasured by their families.

## Resurgence of Pride

As with other immigrant groups, there was some falling away from identification with the country of origin as the immigrants sought to become full-fledged American citizens. But they recently have exhibited a resurgence of interest and pride in their Lebanese origins.

In part, the abandonment of language and culture of origin was due to pressures

from the society to which the Lebanese had immigrated, again an experience similar to that of other important groups.

"You know, teachers would come into the homes and say that the children shouldn't speak Arabic," said one second-generation Lebanese.

The woman in Clark Mills sees some falling away from the old ways in family life, particularly in regard to food. She said she continues to can and preserve food, as her family did on the farm.

United States, immigrants and the first generation experienced some discrimination and strong pressures to assimilate.

The local ADC chapter focuses on cultural issues and on combating anti-Arab stereotyping. The ADC worked hard to stage a Kahlil Gibran exhibit at the local museum. When the museum cancelled the planned show, ADC submitted over 3000 petition signatures. The museum is planning the show in the near future.



In 1915 production of "Hamlet" in Arabic presented by the United Bashinta Society of Utica. These actors and actresses were some of the early immigrants to the Utica Area. The play was presented as a fund raiser for their organization.

The next generation, she said, prefers to buy food at the supermarket, "TV dinners and quickies."

But the third generation is much more interested in its origins. Many continue to make religion central to their lives. One resident said he teaches Sunday school to young people, and he is taking Arabic with his children.

He said he knows many people who are trying to trace their roots in the Middle East. Before the current war, a number of Uticans returned to Lebanon for visits to the cities and villages of their ancestors.

Discrimination is less of a problem in Utica today than in many other American cities for the Arab-American community. However, like all newcomers to the

It also succeeded in removing defamatory Niagara-Mohawk Power commercials that blamed "the Arabs" for costly reliance on foreign oil. In fact, Arabs produce only seven percent of the oil used in New York State. The ADC's "Save Lebanon" project also raised more than \$15,000 and brought two wounded children to Utica for medical treatment.

By and large, the Utica Arab-American community is homogenous in terms of national origins, successful economically, and loyal and patriotic Americans, sending many young men into the armed forces. With assimilation into American society and culture now almost complete, they are again turning to a study and celebration of their origins and traditions.





# Lively Ethnic Mix

by Anthony Toth

**I**N Worcester, Massachusetts, ethnic pride and tradition still reside beneath the hallowed roofs of its churches. For its citizens of Syrian-Lebanese heritage, the Orthodox, Melkite and Maronite churches in the large New England community hold the treasured history of many immigrant families. Ninety percent of Worcester's estimated 3,500 Arab-Americans belong to these Christian denominations. A recent group of Arab immigrants from the Persian Gulf states accounts for the remaining 10 percent. There is a mosque that serves the growing Arab Muslim population.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century Worcester was becoming a "league of nations and religions," according to Morris H. Cohen, a Clarke University professor who has studied the city's ethnic groups. By 1926 Worcester's population of 190,000 included an amazing 70 percent who were foreign-born.

Today Worcester retains the strong multi-ethnic character to which Irish, Italians, French- and British-Canadians, Poles, Swedes and Arabs have contributed. In this respect, Worcester is typical of the New England towns and cities that attracted immigrant laborers to their burgeoning industries.

In other parts of New England immigrants flocked to humming textile mills, but Worcester depended upon the metal-working industries which churned

## Faces of Worcester

**C**HRIS Coury, 25, studied history at Worcester State College and went on to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. to earn a masters degree in Arab Studies. He is now New England director for the National Association of Arab-Americans. "My Syrian heritage," he said, "pushed me on into political action."

The Coury family is attuned to its ethnic traditions, and Chris has always had an interest in Middle East affairs. In 1978 he responded to a letter in a local paper which expressed anti-Arab sentiments, and he has been actively involved in his community ever since.

**Amen Esper, Jr.**, has lived his 63 years in Worcester. He taught himself to read and write Arabic. Now that he is retired from the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, where he was a design and construction engineer, he spends his time traveling, skiing, swimming and playing golf.

Esper's parents, who fled Lebanon because of Ottoman conscription, are both still living in Worcester. Esper has seven grandchildren. "I'm very conscious of my heritage," Esper said.

**Genevieve Thomas** says that after she became a widow 38 years ago, she has been so busy she "has not had time for hobbies."

She took charge of the Thomas Auto Body Shop in Worcester after her husband died and ran it until her recent retirement. Her son now runs the shop, and she spends her time between chairing the Women's Guild at Our Lady of Mercy Maronite Church and the local chapter of St. Jude Children's Hospital. "We try to keep the Lebanese heritage going—the food, the holy days . . ." she said. Mrs. Thomas' parents came from Lebanon before World War I, and she was born in this country in 1918.

**Marie Hilow** says that when she visited her father's village of Aley in Lebanon in 1959, she had a beautiful time. She was able to speak fluent Arabic with her aunts, uncles and cousins. Her knowledge of Arabic is rusty now from disuse, but it still creeps back when she has to describe something from her past. "We were brought up in a very closely knit Lebanese community, and when someone asked me to describe something about it, I could only tell them in Arabic. I didn't know the English."

Mrs. Hilow's father came to the United States around 1920 and settled in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where Mrs. Hilow was born in 1927. She moved to Worcester in 1960 when she married and now works as a billing clerk at Fairlawn Hospital. ■

out hardware such as screws, nails and wiring. Some Arab immigrants worked in these factories, and hundreds of others toiled in the huge Graton & Knight leather processing plant.

Worcester is the site of one of the oldest Antiochian Orthodox communities in the United States. The Orthodox parish of St. George is the largest among the religious groups in the Arab-American community, accounting for roughly half its number.

### "One of the Lucky Ones"

George Wood's father came to this country from Damascus in 1890. Even though George Wood had to start working when he was 16 years old in 1928, and didn't stop until his retirement (at age 65, he says he was "one of the lucky ones" in Worcester's early Syrian-Lebanese community. A year after he began working, the Great Depression cut the livelihoods from under many breadwinners in the Worcester community, as well as in the rest of the country. Wood's first job at the Melville Shoe Company, which supplies Thom McAn Shoe Stores, helped keep his family fed during that time of hardship. Wood started as a clerk and worked his way up the organization until he retired a few years ago as a distribution supervisor.

Wood recently became the first Arab-American in Massachusetts to become a 33rd Degree Mason of the Scottish Rite. This is the highest degree that is awarded, signifying a respected position within that organization. St. George's parish celebrated Wood's honor with a gathering of 300 well-wishers.

Wood recalls how the early Syrian community lived in a neighborhood clustered around St. George's church. Arab immigrants settled on Wall, Suffolk and Norfolk streets on Dungarvin hill. At one time, Dungarvin Hill was nicknamed "French Hill," because of the many French-speaking immigrants who lived there, among them the early Syrian-Lebanese who spoke both French and Arabic.

Syrian-owned dry goods stores, bakeries and coffee shops sprang up on the hill, and the immigrant community began to prosper. Their prosperity eventually enabled them to move to other parts of the city, but they never ceased to contribute time and money to their churches.

## Worshipping and Celebrating

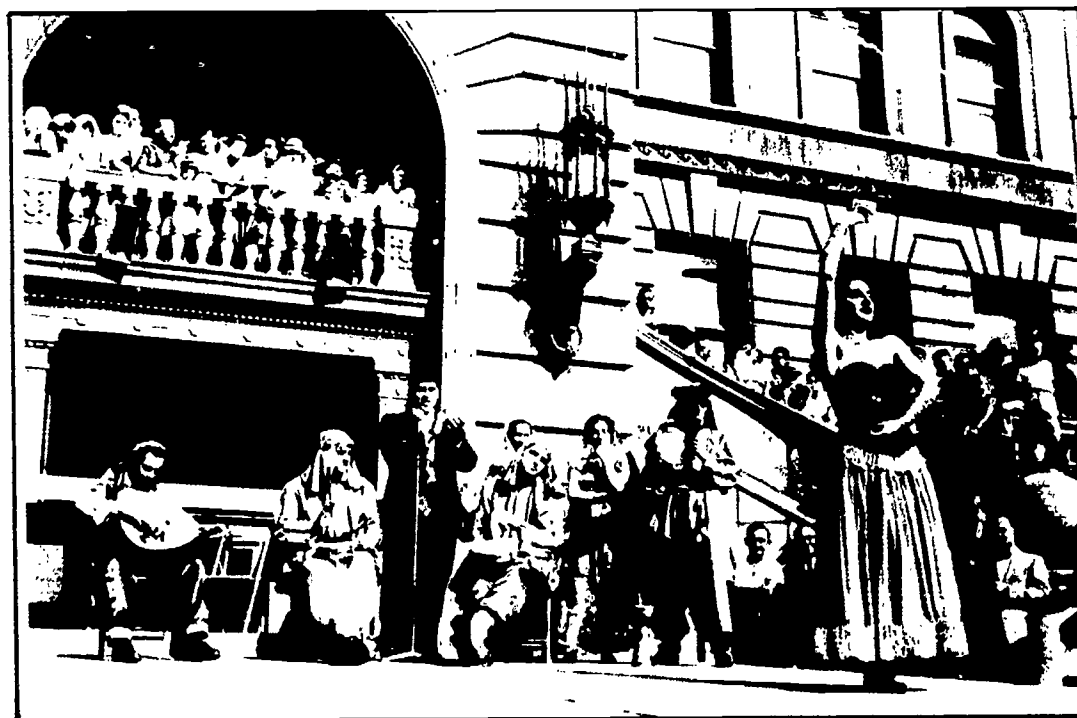
St. George Antiochian Orthodox church was the first in Worcester. Dr. Najib Saliba, who teaches at Worcester State College, says the church was established around 1902 and that "the whole life of the community revolved around it." In 1905, the community founded the Syrian Orthodox Society.

The society served the Syrian community by assisting new immigrants and providing traditional burial services. In these early years, the Orthodox community did not have a permanent priest or church building, and it was the society that raised funds for both. By 1905, St. George's occupied a building on Wall Street, and a school was opened there to teach English and provide religious instruction.

Today approximately 430 families support St. George's parish, according to its pastor Father George Shahin. The present church was built in 1956 on Anna Street. The women's club holds dinners, *haflehs* and bazaars where handcrafts and baked goods are sold to raise money for the church. The Knights of St. George and the Teen SOYO are the parish's other active social and service groups. At the yearly celebration of the Feast of St. George, parishioners serve Arab food and dance to traditional music, and even the Bishop makes an appearance. "We've had a lot of good times at the church," says George Wood. "We're a tight-knit group."

The second largest group among Worcester's Arab-Americans is the Melkite community which worships at Our Lady of Perpetual Help. In the years before World War I, the Melkites did not have a church or priest. According to the present pastor, Father James King, in 1923 they found a priest from Holy Savior Monastery to perform services for them.

About 80 percent of the early Melkite immigrants came from the Lebanese mountain community of Mashkara. Many found their way to Worcester because they were skilled leather craftsmen, and when they arrived at Ellis Island they



Native Arab dance, dress and music drew admiring looks from Worcester residents who watched the Caravan Band perform in front of city hall in 1959. 95



Worcester's Christian Arab-Americans are well-served with three Syrian Rite churches in the city. Shown here and on the opposite page are two of them. Above, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Melkite Church features hundreds of crosses in relief on the twelve-sided structure. The pastor, Father James King, right, celebrates liturgy.

Opposite page, a bright dome accentuates the clean lines of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in this 1970 bird's-eye view. The St. George community is the largest Christian denomination of Arab-Americans in Worcester.



were told to go to the Graton & Knight leather works in Worcester.

Joe Aboody, a Melkite whose father came from Mashkara, remembers the "awful, awful smell" that floated through the hillside homes of the Arab immigrants from the factory's tall smokestacks. At one time, he says, hundreds of Lebanese worked at the plant, which tanned hides and produced finished leather products.

Some Melkite families have their roots in the Syrian communities of Aleppo and Damascus. There has been extensive intermarriage among the Melkite and Orthodox communities, and the religious homogeneity that was true in the homeland has diminished in this country.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help is a unique twelve-sided brick structure located on a shady five-acre lot. Its pastor describes it as "one of the most striking buildings in Worcester." It is a far cry from the humble wooden church that was purchased by the parish in 1923.

Father King says that although the church no longer offers instruction in Arabic, the language is kept alive through its use in Sunday services. "I try to incorporate some of the religious traditions of the old country into the service," King said. "The people appreciate this very much. For instance, many of them were surprised to learn that Arabs are Semites, too." The Melkites have a big

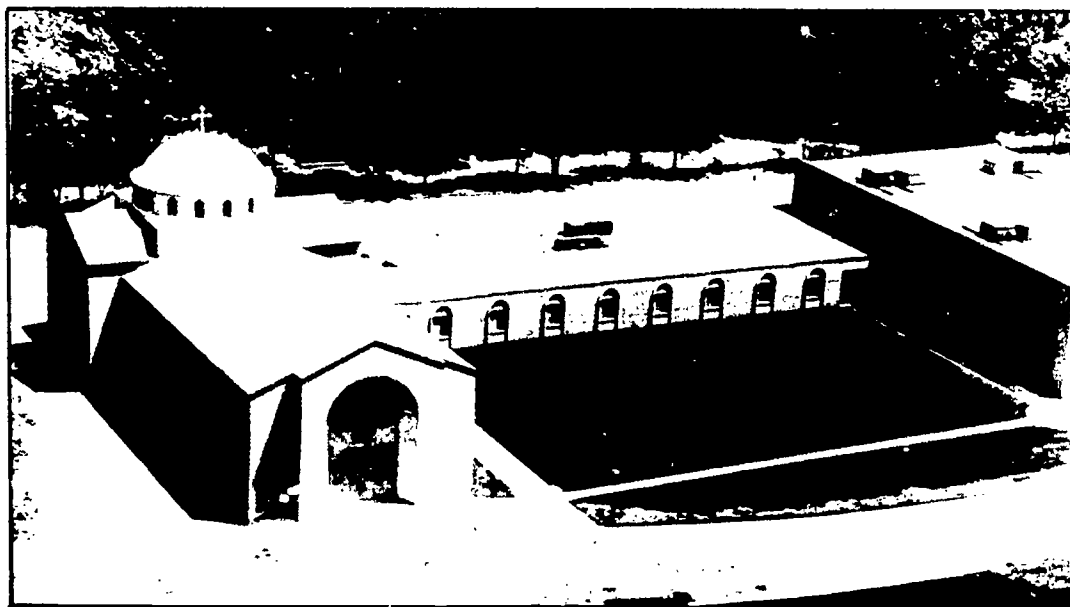
*mahrajan* every year, and the most recent outdoor Arab festival drew nearly 2,000 people.

Worcester's third Christian community is the Maronite parish of Our Lady of Mercy. The pastor, Father Joseph Saidi, recalls the first Maronite, John Isaac, came to Worcester in 1893. By the turn of the century there were several Maronite families who attended services at other Catholic churches. It was not until 1906 that the first Maronite service was held by a pastor who came to the area from Boston.

Most of the Maronite families came to Worcester after 1910 from Beirut, Jezzine, Al Islah and other Lebanese towns and cities. In the 1920s, when there were about 70 Maronites in Worcester, Father Paul Rizk became the first pastor and the parish moved to what had formerly been a Protestant church on Mulberry Street.

## Clubs and Societies

Since its inception, the Arab-American community has looked back to its roots in the Middle East and forward to its growing involvement in American language and customs. Syrian-American clubs sprang up wherever there were significant numbers of immigrants and their children. Some Worcester residents



Photos Worcester Telegram & Gazette, Inc.

from the South Lebanese village of Mhaiti formed the Mhaiti Society in 1917. This group is still active arranging burials and engaging in charitable works. Its members collect money to send to relatives and the church in their home village.

The Worcester Syrian-American Club was established in 1930 and participated that year in the tricentennial festivities of the city. The club entered a float depicting "an American historical scene," according to *Syrian World Magazine*, and won second prize. Two years later, the club was represented at a celebration of George Washington's bicentennial anniversary held by the Boston Syrian-American Club at which prominent political leaders were present.

Saidi remembers a few of the clubs that were established over the years by local Maronites who wanted to socialize and to help the church raise money. The first was the Cedar Club, established in 1937. In 1948 came the Maronite Club, followed in the 1950s by the Men's Club. Finally, Our Lady of Mercy Women's

Guild began in the 1960s and continues its work today, holding social events and running a bingo game.

### El Morocco--An Institution

The best restaurant in Worcester . . . jazz club extraordinaire . . . playground of celebrities . . . an institution . . . El Morocco Restaurant is a family operation that has grown from humble origins to become Worcester's premier place of dining and entertainment. It is a landmark of the social landscape of the city.

Joe Aboody is the president of the restaurant, which was run by Paul Aboody, his father, since it opened its doors in 1945. Though Paul died in the summer of 1983, his memory is still fresh in his son's mind as he describes with vivid detail the history of El Morocco.

"My father came from the Lebanese town of Mashkara," says Joe. he was one of many immigrants sent to work at Graton & Knight. Paul Aboody left the



The El-Morocco Restaurant

Photos: Worcester Telegram & Gazette, Inc.



factory after a short while to hold various jobs, including a stint as a bartender. "He worked hard to feed us," recalls Joe.

In 1925 the family was able to buy a building on Wall Street which had been a home for some French nuns. In the first floor storefront they opened one of the first Middle East bakeries in the United States. Aboody's cousins still operate Kalil's Bakery, which has since moved to Hamilton Street. On the roof of the Wall Street building the Aboodys built a grape arbor, reminiscent of those found by many hillside homes in Lebanon. The family gathered beneath the arbor for long happy hours of conversation.

The Aboody family soon opened a coffee house where locals would sit to drink strong Turkish coffee and eat ice cream and pastries. "Some of the customers would play cards, using old decks as chips so if the police came they couldn't tell they were betting," Aboody said.

El Morocco was established in 1945 as a small family restaurant that served Arabic food. Patrons were occasionally treated to impromptu musical entertainment by Paul Aboody and his musically inclined friends. "My father had a knack for entertaining. . . . He was very well liked," said Joe. "Dad would take out his Arab drum and play into the wee hours of the morning with other musicians."

The restaurant got a boost one day from a favorable review. The day after it appeared in the newspaper, about 100 people descended on the tiny five-table eatery. From then on, it was expand, expand, expand. First the Aboodys annexed the store next door, then dug out a basement beneath the building. Today's El Morocco at 100 Wall Street opened six years ago with festivities to which the whole city was invited. And practically the whole city came. Thousands thronged to the restaurant, and Joe says the local police volunteered to handle the traffic.

Truman Capote, Liza Minelli, Estelle Parsons and Bette Midler are just a few of the celebrities who have enjoyed El Morocco's fare. The late Arthur Fiedler, conductor of the Boston Pops Symphony Orchestra, called El Morocco his favorite

restaurant. "He used to tell his chauffeur to bring him here after a concert, and he would go back into the kitchen to fix a steak," recalls Aboody. "About three weeks before he died, he spent a long evening with my father."

When Joe's father passed away last summer, Worcester mourned the passing of one of its most popular citizens. Lengthy obituaries in local papers and thousands of mourners paid tribute to the Lebanese immigrant from Mashkara who made good.

The El Morocco still thrives on its popularity, with Aboody family members working in the kitchen, in the office and serving patrons in the dining rooms. "We never advertise for the business," says Joe. "The other restaurants in town couldn't understand how we made it. We were the smallest, dumpiest place, on the wrong side of the tracks."

El Morocco is a shining example of who Arabs are, what they eat, how they entertain and how they can succeed. "I remember when I went to school the kids didn't know what Lebanese was," says Joe. The Arab-American community appreciates what the El Morocco has done for the community's image. "They say, 'Thank God for the El Morocco.'" ■

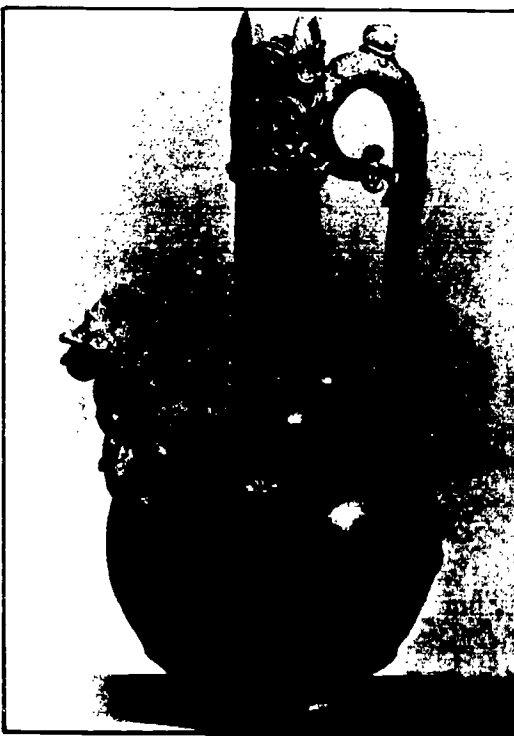
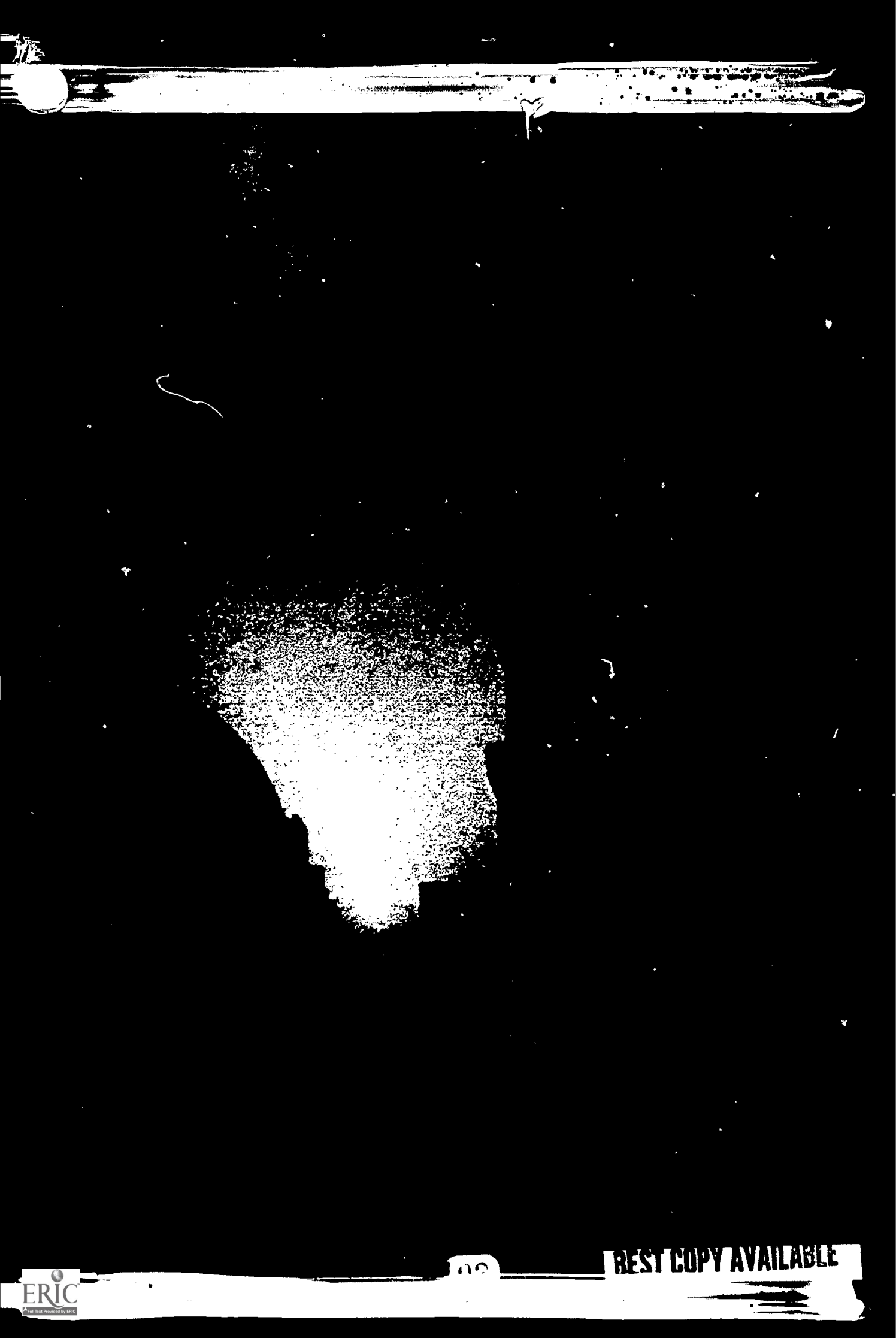


Photo: Arabic Museum, Cairo



# Arab Muslims in America: Adaption and Reform

by Yvonne Haddad

**S**IGNIFICANT Arab Muslim migration to the United States occurred in several waves—1875 to 1912, 1918 to 1922 when Lebanese Arabs came to work in the Ford Rouge Plant in Dearborn, Michigan, 1930 to 1938, 1947 to 1960, and 1967 to the present. The two world wars and changes in U.S. immigration laws were principally responsible for the interruptions in the flow of immigrants.

The first permanent group arrived from what was then called Greater Syria, now the combined area of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. Mostly uneducated, unskilled, and of peasant stock, this group left their homes in the mountain areas of Lebanon in response to favorable reports from Lebanese Christians who had worked as immigrants in the United States.

The economic situation in the Middle East from 1890 to World War I gave impetus to immigration. Farming had become unprofitable because of a general decline in the price of agricultural products. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 destroyed the land route to India and resulted in the loss of income levied on transit shipments. The Japanese competition in silk production led to the flooding of Lebanon's traditional French market, cheapened prices, and practically eliminated the silk industry of Mount Lebanon. To further aggravate the situation, the vineyards of the area became infested with disease.

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Photo: Richard Wurm, U.S. Immigration Service

Around 1900, the number of Muslims who entered the United States increased, especially among the Shia and the Druze. Apprehension about traveling to a non-Muslim country dampened the motivations of many, but continuing success stories of other immigrants provided the necessary incentive.

In the United States, several factors worked to impede the flow of immigrants. Many were turned down by immigration officials at Ellis Island. Discrimination appeared in various localities where Arab immigrants settled. One court found persons from the Arab world ineligible for citizenship because they were neither Caucasian nor African. Although a higher court overruled that decision, the debate about the size of head and nose as determinants of race continued in the press.

The immigrants also faced new laws that restricted the number permitted into the United States. Preference was given to relatives of previous immigrants, as evidenced in the flow of immigration after World War II. Intermarriage and the influx of relatives from the Middle East helped to preserve old country ideals and customs and to slow down the process of acculturation and assimilation.

By the 1950's, most of the Arab countries had gained their independence and were undergoing radical changes due to the failure of the institutions implanted by the colonial powers. This resulted in a new kind of immigrant arriving in this country. A growing number came from the capitalist classes, the landed gentry, and the influential urban-based families of various countries, who had been replaced by new leadership. Many were Palestinians displaced by the creation of the state of Israel, Egyptians whose land had been appropriated by the Nasser regime, Syrians overthrown by revolutionaries, and Iraqi royalists fleeing the Republican regime.

The majority of these post-World War II immigrants were westernized and fluent in English. They sought higher education, advanced technical training, and specialized work opportunities as well as ideological fulfillment. About two-thirds of the students married American

women and pursued integration into the general society. Many of them now teach in colleges and universities and can be considered to have achieved intellectual as well as social integration.

Mainly from urban areas, most of this group arrived with the intention of settling permanently. They had attended western or westernized schools in their home countries. Some had experimented in representative government or remembered their frustrated efforts to institute freely elected governments in their countries. Their ethnic identities were thus influenced by national, rather than religious considerations.

It is estimated that about 50,000 Arab Muslim intellectuals entered the United States in the decade between 1957 and 1967. Of these, 73 percent had received higher education in Europe and the United States. Their impact on Islamic institutions in this country appears to be marginal, however. The majority were either "un-mosqued," that is, did not attend the mosque, or were "Eid Muslims," those who participate in mosque services on the two main Islamic feasts, Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr.

There are no reliable statistics on the number of Muslims in the United States most of whom are non-Arab. Estimates have ranged up to half a million.

## **The Development of Islamic Institutions**

The development of Islamic institutions in the United States came about slowly because the number of Muslims in proportion to the total population has been relatively small. Immigrants who came to amass wealth and then return to their homelands were not interested in establishing institutions. Their allegiance remained with their families at home, which they helped support financially.

Those Muslims who decided to settle in this country, however, began to think of developing institutions and organizations to preserve their faith and to transmit it to their children. Individuals

in different areas took the initiative: Abdullah Ingram in Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Muhammad Omar in Quincy, Massachusetts; J. Howar in Washington, D.C. In other cities, like Dearborn, Michigan, a small but determined group backed the effort.

The earliest recorded group of Moslems who organized for communal prayer in private homes was in Ross, North Dakota, in 1900. By 1920 they had built a mosque. Later, they became so integrated into the community that they assumed Christian names and married Christians. By 1948, the mosque was abandoned.

In 1919, an Islamic association was established in Highland Park, Michigan, followed by another one in Detroit in 1922. A Young Men's Muslim Association (Arab) was established in Brooklyn in 1923; and the Arab Banner Society in Quincy in 1930. The first building designated as a mosque was in Cedar Rapids in 1934. The mosque founders also purchased the first Muslim cemetery, believed to be the only one in the United

States. In 1957, the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C. opened to serve an American congregation as well as members of the Muslim diplomatic corps residing in the capital. Today, there are over 400 mosques and Islamic associations in the United States.

### **Adapting Islamic Practice In America**

As in other areas of the world, the initial growth period of Islam in North America reflected "mixing" or acculturation. Severed from traditions accumulated over centuries, the immigrants attempted to create their own Islamic institutions. For this, they borrowed institutional forms from the local inhabitants. The role of the mosque in North America is closer to that of denominational churches than to mosques in the Arab world.

Historically, the mosque has functioned as a gathering place for the community, where Muslims expressed their religious and political allegiance



**Recognizing the need to keep the Muslim heritage alive, Islamic Institutes throughout the country offer education for the children which helps reinforce the values of Islam. Shown here is the Cedar Rapids mosque.**

**Right: Brooklyn Heights, N.Y. Islamic Institute**  
**Below: Detroit, Michigan's Islamic Center of America**  
**Bottom right: Mihrab in Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain**

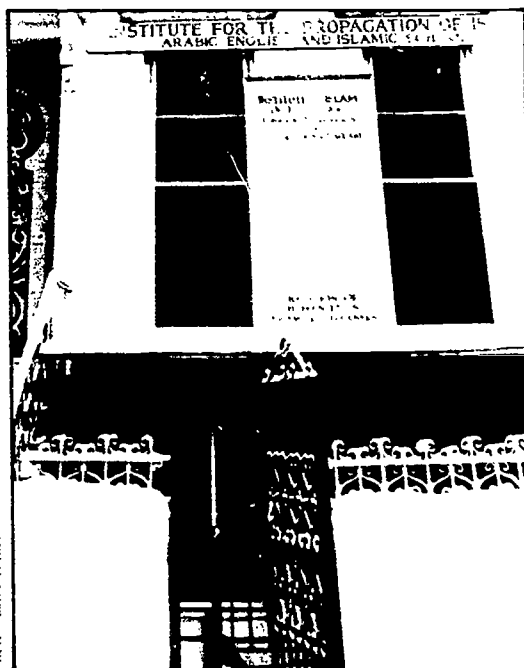


Photo: Alan Dehmer



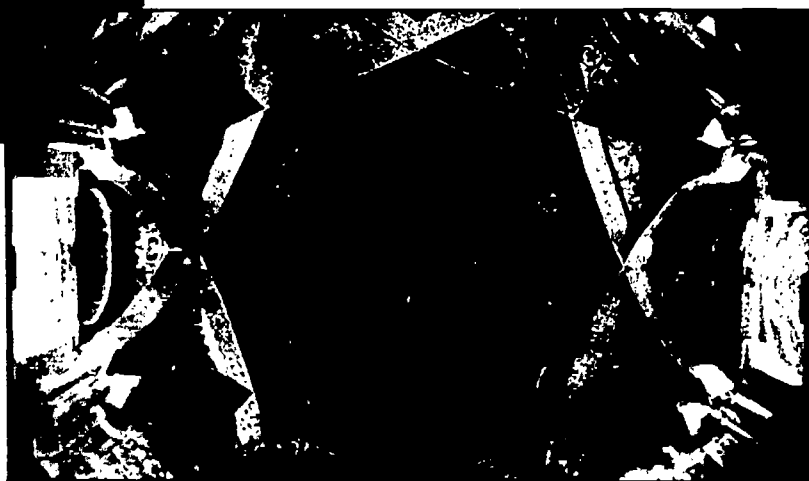
Photo: Maren Eshah

during the Friday service. In the new country, it acquired a social and cultural meaning as the Arab Muslims struggled to maintain an Arab and Islamic identity in an alien culture. Not only are weddings and funerals conducted in the mosque, in keeping with American practices, but even fund-raising activities, directed primarily by women, such as mosque bazaars, bake sales, community dinners, and cultural events have been adopted as well.

Women participate in other aspects of mosque life generally not open to them in the Middle East. They attend the Sunday service and teach Sunday school. Interviews with second- and third-generation Muslims indicate the very active role assumed by pioneering Arab Muslim women in the construction and maintenance of the mosque.

This role has been curtailed in areas where more recently arrived immigrants predominate. A coalition between illiterate traditional rural men and highly educated young students or immigrants committed to a strict Islamic order has formed, and, as one third-generation Arab-American Muslim put it, appears to be operative in "wresting the leadership of the mosque" away from those who labored long to bring it into being. In an increasing number of Arab Muslim mosques where traditional imams have been installed, women have seen their participation in mosque functions reduced and restricted, a restructuring aimed at conforming to patterns idealized in the Arab world.

Photo: Michael Angutt, *The Genius of Arab Civilization*



Moslems who settled in this country applied the principles of architecture so familiar in the Middle East to the mosques they built here. Shown on these two pages are some American mosques and their predecessors in Cordoba and Jerusalem.



## The Movement for Reform

Since the beginning of the 1970s, there has been a return to normative Islam, sometimes referred to as "reform." Efforts are made to purge Islam of innovations which accumulated over the years and to eradicate unnecessary and un-Islamic patterns of acculturation. Reform has been heightened by the influx of new immigrants from Lebanon (1975-82), many of whom are totally committed to Islam as a way of life. This commitment appears to be a result of the sectarian strife in that country and its influence in stimulating, if not crystalizing, confessionalism.

The dramatic increase in the number of Muslims in the United States in the last decade has heartened followers who remember a time when Muslim holidays went by scarcely noticed or observed. The celebrations in the various mosques and organizations have added a new dimension to the growing sense of dignity, identity and purpose of the Muslims. Perhaps S.S. Mufassir best captured the change when, on the occasion of the American Bicentennial, he wrote in *Islamic Items*: "But the technotronic cybernetic society which has put to death the false God of man's making has failed to render Islam irrelevant. Islam has survived in the very heart of the industrialized West, and has pushed forward with indomitable spirit without apology, compromise, assimilation or mutation." ■

**This article was excerpted, with permission, from a longer article that appeared in *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Nabeel Abraham and Sameer Y. Abraham, Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies. Copyright 1983.**

**Top: Cedar Rapids, Iowa Mosque  
Center: Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem  
Bottom Right: Dearborn, Michigan Mosque**

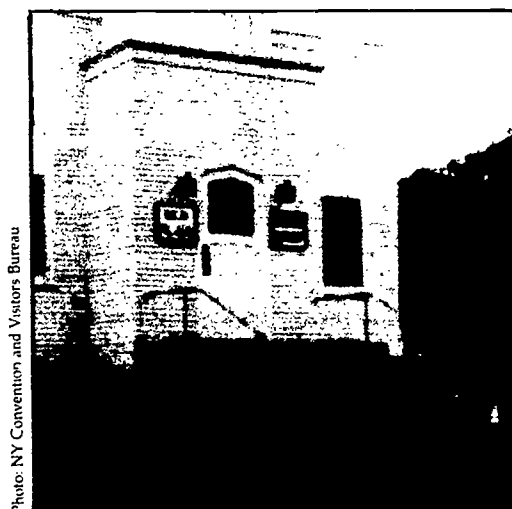


Photo: NY Convention and Visitors Bureau



Photo: Alastair Duncan, *The Genesis of Arab Civilization*

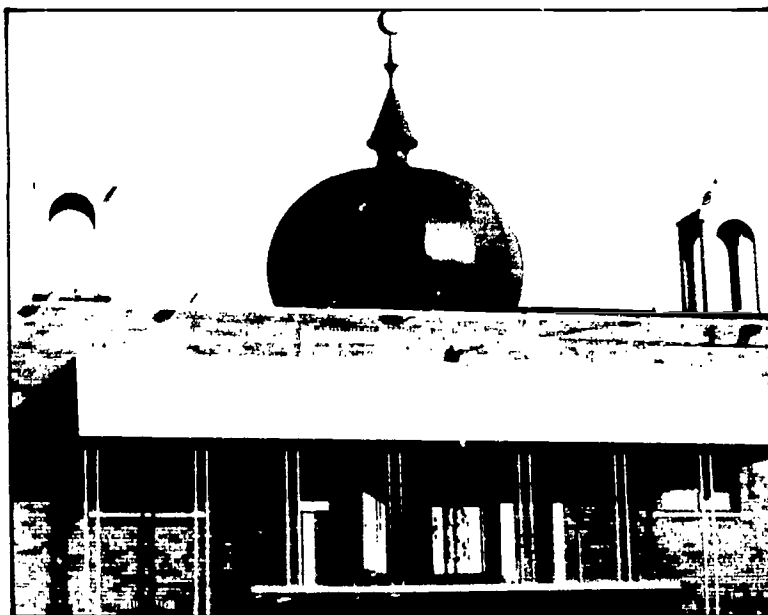
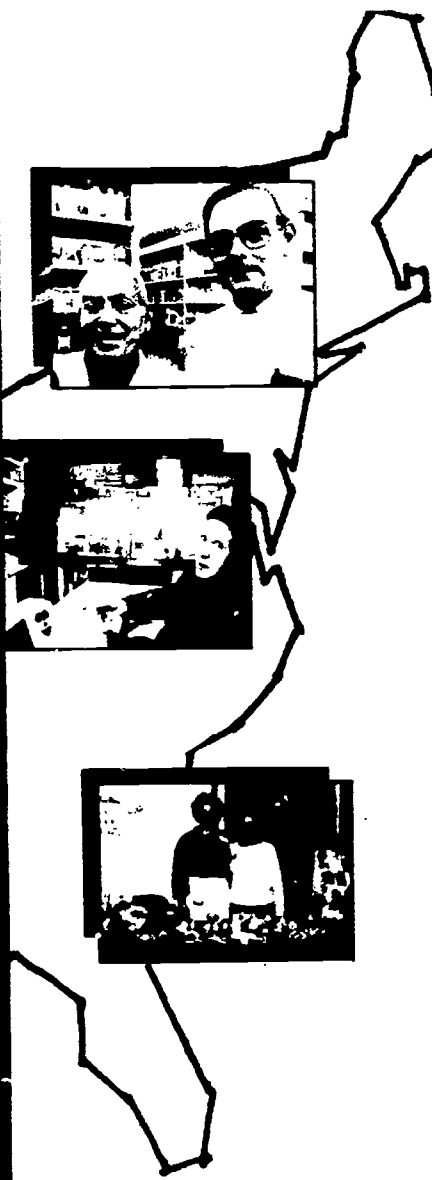


Photo: Maren Eudoh



# The Way We are: A Regional Survey



**A**RAB-American communities dot the United States, but they have, until now, gone unnoticed by outsiders. Until now, there has been no general survey of where in the U.S. Arab-Americans live. With this issue, *ADC Reports* inaugurates this service, with the results of its pilot project following in this section. This set of almanac-type entries offers ADC members a chance to get "the big picture," to realize how widespread and how diverse our communities are, and to begin to make the links between them.

This is a first of its kind. And like any trial effort it has gaps and room for improvement. And that is where you, and your friends, and your family, come in. Please become a contributor to the ADC Regional Survey.

We assembled this information as a result of a telephone survey to Arab-Americans, many of them ADC members, in 10 regions of the U.S. We learned many things, only a small part of which we had room for in this survey. One of the things we learned was that there were many more of you that we *didn't* contact than we did. And next year we want you to be in it. So please take a few minutes and fill out the questionnaire at the end of this section. Tell all of us, all over the U.S., about your part of it.

Of course, the life of every community rests on the living history of its older members. And that is where another ADC project begins: the recapturing of our oral histories. Next to the questionnaire, you will find another form, one that lets us know that you are collecting the memories of someone from the group of immigrants who first established Arab-American communities. ADC is looking for members of two generations to tell us all about our past. First, we want to hear from people who made *The Passage*—the journey from the Middle East to this country at the turn of and in the early part of this century. Second, we want to hear from those who made up *The Exodus*, the journey in flight from political persecution and refugee status to a new home.

What *ADC Reports* offers here is a rough sketch for what you will make into "the big picture."

## New England

Arab Americans in New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine) number 210,000 among a total population of close to 10 million. Most trace their origins to Lebanon and Syria. Others came to the region from Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and more recently, Oman and Kuwait. They live in Danbury and Bethel, Connecticut; Manchester, Portsmouth, Nashua, Lebanon, and Berlin, New Hampshire; and Fall River, Lawrence, Boston, Worcester, and Pocasset, Massachusetts. The majority of New England's Arab-Americans are Christian and belong to the numerous Eastern rite churches scattered throughout the region. A number of mosques in Connecticut and Massachusetts cater to the smaller Muslim communities. Approximately 60 percent of the Arab-American community in New England is second generation, 30 percent third and fourth generation. The remaining 10 percent consists of recent immigrants.

Arab-American religious institutions in New England include Maronite churches: St. George in New Hampshire; St. Anthony, Our Lady of Mercy, Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon, and Our Lady of Purgatory in Massachusetts; St. Anthony in Connecticut. Greek Orthodox Churches: St. George in New Hampshire and St. George in Massachusetts. Antiochian Orthodox churches: St. George in New Hampshire and St. George in Connecticut. One Syrian Orthodox church: St. Mary in Massachusetts; Melkite churches: St. Joseph, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Cathedral of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Massachusetts; St. Stephen Mission in New Hampshire; St. Anne in Connecticut. There are Islamic centers in Boston, Quincy and Springfield, Massachusetts, and Hartford, New Haven and Stamford, Connecticut.

Other Arab-American organizations in the tri-state area comprise the Lebanon-American Club, and Maaser Society in Connecticut; the Lebanese Society in New Hampshire; St. George Antiochian

Orthodox Women's Club and Men's Club, the Knights of St. George, Our Lady of Purgatory Maronite Lebanese Veterans' Association, the Lebanese

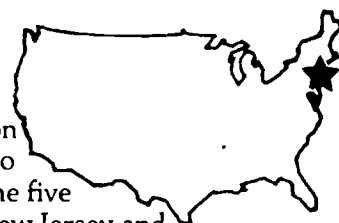
Community Center, the Arab-American Benevolent Association, the American Arabic Association, the Syrian-Lebanese Women's Club, the Syrian-Lebanese Ladies' Society, the Syrian-Lebanese Club, the United Lebanese Society, the Lebanese Association for Elderly Housing; the American-Lebanese Awareness Association, the Deir-el-Qamar Association, the Sons of Lebanon Club, and the Mheiti Society, all in Massachusetts. Local chapters of most national Arab-American organizations, including the National Association of Arab Americans and the ADC, have chapters in major cities throughout the area. The Association of Arab-American University Graduates is headquartered in Belmont, MA.

Programs and activities sponsored by the various organizations, both religious and secular, include ethnic festivals, church bazaars, fund-raising dinners, traditional *hafflehs*, scholarships for Arab-American youth, and the construction of 40 units of low-cost housing for the Arab-American elderly. ■

## Metropolitan New York

The total population of the New York metro area, which includes the five boroughs, northern New Jersey and Yonkers, is more than 8 million. The estimated Arab-American population of the New York metro area is 180,000.

The earliest Arab-American settlers in New York arrived from the region of Greater Syria between 1880 and 1924. Today they are scattered throughout the area, with concentrations of Syrian-



Lebanese in Brooklyn and Yonkers. A large group of Syrians lives in Patterson, N.J. Since the 1960s, thousands of Palestinians have immigrated to the United States, making them the third largest group of Arab-Americans in greater New York. They live in Patterson, upper Manhattan, Brooklyn and in the Bergen City and West New York areas of Hudson County. Several thousand Yemenis also live in Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue section, though they tend not to settle there permanently, returning to Yemen after a period of earning money for their families.

The Arab-American community is broken down roughly as follows: Syrian-Lebanese, 65 to 70 percent; Palestinians, around 15 percent; Yemenis and Jordanians, 5 percent each; and Egyptians, 2 percent. Approximately 40 percent of the Arab-American population is first generation; 15 percent is second; 25

percent is third; and the upcoming fourth generation makes up the remaining 20 percent.

Organizations and religious institutions catering to Arab-Americans exist throughout the New York metro area. The Arab Women's Council, Islamic Cultural Society and the Arab-American Women's Friendship Association are women's social, cultural and political organizations. Other organizations include the Muslim World Organization for Political and Social Change, the Muslim World League, the Egyptian Professional Organization, Palestine Congress, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Palestine Red Crescent, Muslim Arab Community of Northern New Jersey, Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Muslim Organization Committee and several American organizations concerned with Middle East affairs.

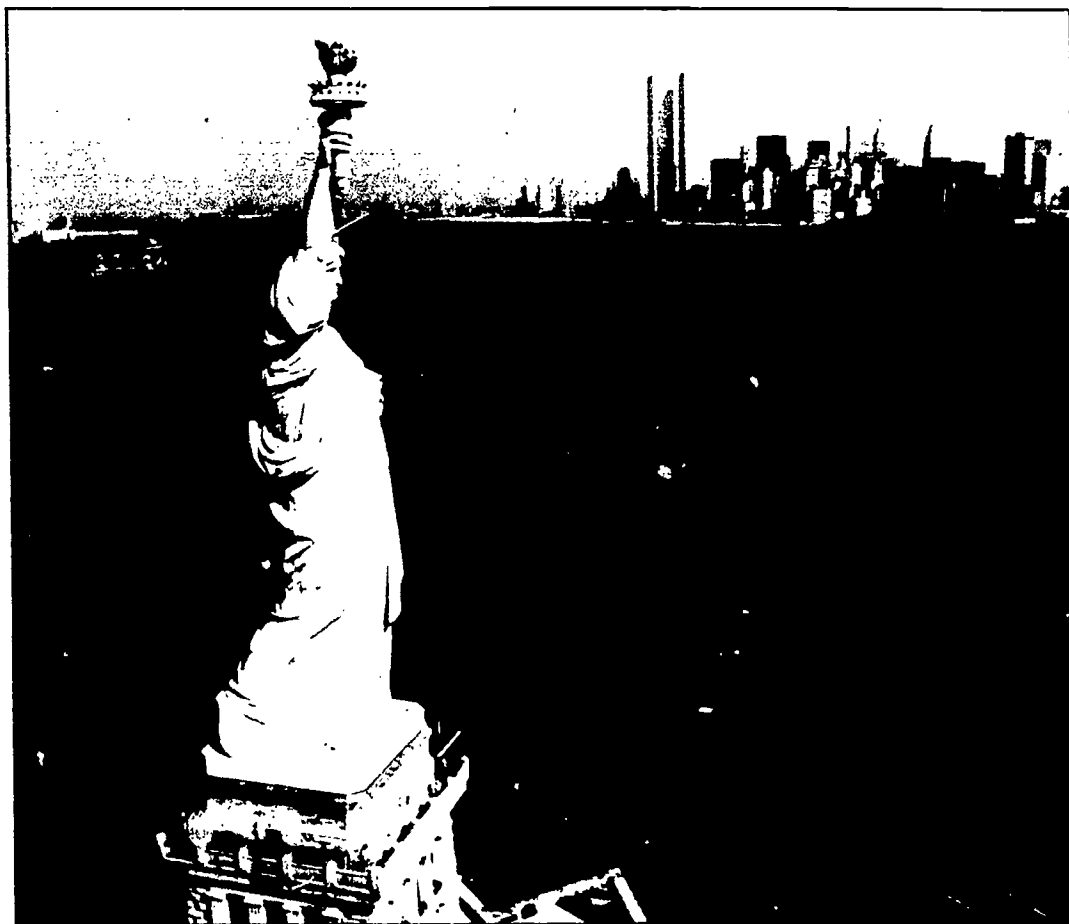


Photo: NY Convention and Visitors Bureau

Arab-American religious needs are served by a variety of institutions. Melkite churches are located in Patterson, Brooklyn, and Yonkers. Coptic churches in Jersey City and Brooklyn serve the recent Egyptian immigrants. The Maronite cathedral is located in Brooklyn. Syrian Orthodox churches are located in Brooklyn and Patterson as well as Bergenfield and Yonkers. The Muslim community has mosques in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Westchester, Jersey City, Patterson, Newark and Pasaic. ■

Buffalo, respectively; St. George Orthodox Church in Albany; St. George Syrian Orthodox Church in Utica; and St. Michael Orthodox Church in Geneva. Maronite Churches include St. Maron in Williamsville; Our Lady of Lebanon in Niagara; St. Ann Maronite Church in Troy; and St. Louis of Gonzaga in Utica. The two Melkite churches are St. Basil in Utica and St. Nicholas in Rochester. There are Islamic Centers in Schenectady, Buffalo, Lackawanna, Syracuse, with one being built in Rochester.

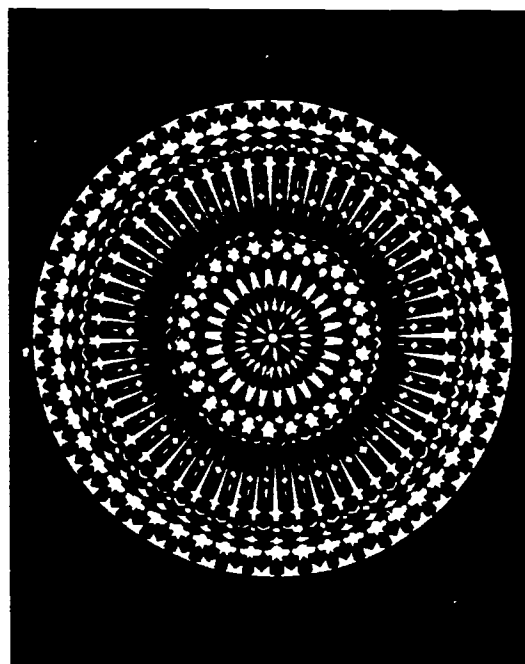


## Upstate New York

There are an estimated 90,000 to 105,000 Arab-Americans in upstate New York. Total population of the area is estimated at 5 million.

Arab-Americans are concentrated in Albany, Buffalo/Niagara Falls, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, with a small community in Binghamton. The vast majority are Syrian/Lebanese of which most are Christian. All three major Christian denominations, Maronite, Melkite, and Orthodox, are present, though certain areas are fairly exclusive. Whereas most of the Lebanese in Utica are Maronite, most of the Syrians in Geneva are Orthodox. There are, though, some Muslim and Druze Lebanese. The second major group is the Palestinians, most of whom came in the 1960s and 1970s. Of these Palestinians, roughly one-half are Christian and one-half are Muslim. Other sizable groups include the Egyptians in Schenectady and the Yemenis in Lackawanna. Small numbers of Iraqis and Jordanians can be found throughout the area.

Of the three major Christian denominations, the Orthodox have the largest number of churches: St. Elias in Syracuse; St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church and St. George Orthodox Church in Niagara Falls and



Whereas there are few, if any, Arab-American groups outside the church in Geneva and Albany, Utica, Syracuse, Buffalo/Niagara Falls, and Rochester host a number of organizations. National Arab-American groups such as NAAA and ADC are found in the major areas, and often the memberships and activities overlap. There are other non-sectarian Arab-American groups such as the Arab-American Council in Syracuse and the Arab-American Federation in Buffalo. Various nationalist groups also exist, some of which are the Cedars of Lebanon Club, the Ramallah Club, the American Lebanese League, the Yemeni Club, and

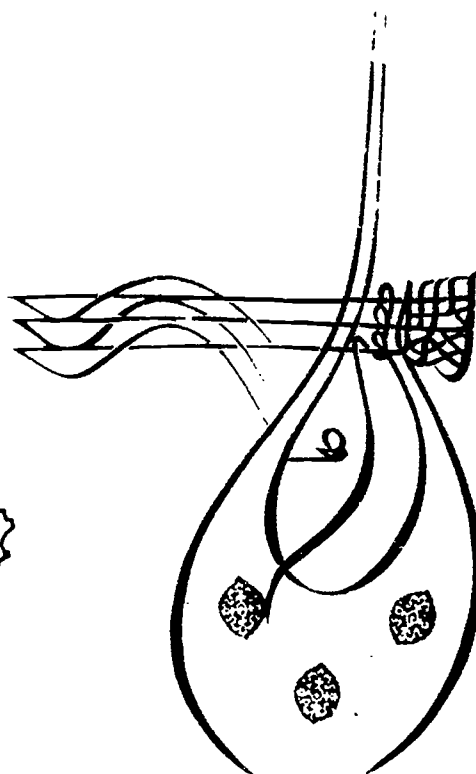


the Palestine Human Rights Campaign. Student groups are mainly in Albany, Buffalo, and Syracuse, which have general Arab Student Organizations as well as smaller national groups. In addition to these groups, ethnic festivals in Rochester, Utica, Buffalo/Niagara Falls, and Syracuse bring the Arab-American community together. ■

## Pennsylvania

The estimated Arab-American population of Pennsylvania is 120,000, in a state whose total population is estimated at 12 million. Arab-American communities exist in cities in the eastern and western parts of the state. In the east, these include the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Allentown, Easton, Wilkes-Barre and Scranton. In the west, they are the Pittsburgh metropolitan area, including Jeanette, New Castle, Johnstown and Altoona. The majority of Arab-Americans across the state is second and third generation—the assimilated children and grandchildren of the Arab immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1890 and the 1920s. One exception is Allentown, where immigrants who began arriving in the late 1960s and in increasing numbers throughout the 1970s make up an estimated 65 percent of the population. In the other cities, the ratio of relatively new arrivals to second and third generation Arab-Americans varies from 10 percent in the Johnstown-Altoona area to 50 percent in Philadelphia. The majority of Arab-Americans in the state are of Syrian and Lebanese origin. Most are Christian, either Eastern Orthodox or Maronite. New Castle has one of the largest and oldest Alawi communities in the country.

Each Arab-American community has its social or cultural organization, which often serves as a center for community activity. These include the Ramallah Club (Philadelphia), the Arab-American



Cultural Society and organizations to raise funds for the villages of origin (Allentown), the Northeastern Association of Arab-Americans and the Knights of Lebanon (Wilkes-Barre/Scranton), and the "El Fityet Aliween" Club and Islamic Society of Greater New Castle.

The churches play a central role in each of the communities. In Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, there are several Eastern Orthodox and Maronite Churches, including St. George Eastern Orthodox Church in Upper Darby in the Philadelphia suburbs and Our Lady of Victory Maronite Church in Pittsburgh as well as the largest Orthodox Church in Pittsburgh, St. George's. Other churches include St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church (Wilkes-Barre), St. George Syrian Orthodox Church (Allentown), Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church (Easton), St. John Maronite Church and St. Elias Orthodox Church (New Castle) and one of the oldest Orthodox Churches in the archdiocese, St. Mary Antiochian Church in Johnstown.

There are mosques in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and an Islamic Society for the Alawi and Sunni communities in New Castle and a small Moslem community associated with Lehigh University in Easton. ■



## Ohio

The Arab-American community in Ohio, estimated at 120,000, is approximately 40 percent immigrant and 60 percent later generation. All five major cities, Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Toledo and Akron, have large Arab-American populations. The majority of Arab-Americans in Ohio are Syrian-Lebanese, of whom most are Christian. The others are the Palestinians, of whom two-thirds are Christian and one-third Muslim, and the Egyptians, of whom roughly half are Coptic and half Muslim. A small number of Iraqis also live in Ohio.

Of the three major Christian denominations, the Orthodox have the most churches in Ohio: St. George and St. Elias in Toledo; St. Nicholas in Cincinnati; St. George in Cleveland; St. George in Akron. Maronite churches are: St. Anthony in Cincinnati; St. Maron in Cleveland; Cedar of Lebanon Maronite Church in Akron. There are three Melkite churches in the state: St. Elias in Cleveland; St. Joseph in Akron; one in Columbus. There are Coptic churches in both Cleveland and Columbus. The Muslim community is well-served by Islamic centers in all major metropolitan areas. Non-sectarian organizations include the Cleveland Association of Middle East Organizations (CAMEO) and the Arab-American Associations in Cincinnati, Toledo, Cleveland and Columbus attract a diverse group of Arab-Americans. Often the memberships and activities overlap.

Major nationalist groups include the American Syrian-Lebanese Clubs in Columbus and Cleveland, the Kirby Kanafar Club in Akron, the Ramallah Club in Cleveland, the Egyptian Friendship Society in Columbus, and the Palestine Human Rights Campaign in Cincinnati. University Arab and Arab-American groups abound, with Arab student organizations in each of the major cities. Annual events such as the International Folk Festival in Cincinnati and the *hafflehs* and festivals put on by many of the churches are important functions that keep Ohio Arab-Americans cohesive and proud of their heritage. ■



Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum



## Midwest

Arab-Americans first came to the Midwest in the early 1900s from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. Most of them immigrated to America in search of work, and traveled to Midwest cities after hearing of job opportunities from factory recruiters who often met them as they arrived at Ellis Island. In the Midwest, the Arab-Americans, invariably called Syrians, worked in many types of mills, peddled goods, or set up small businesses such as produce markets and clothing stores. A few even became homesteaders, like a group of Lebanese Muslims who established the first mosque in the U.S. at Ross, North Dakota. Other early Muslim communities settled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and Michigan City, Indiana. Today small but significant pockets of Arab-American culture are found in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas, as well as in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Indiana. Two of the largest concentrations of Arab-Americans can be found in Detroit and Chicago.

## Detroit

Metropolitan Detroit's diverse population of 4.7 million includes some 250,000 Arab-Americans. Of these, 50 percent are first generation and 50 percent second, third and fourth generation. In the Detroit regions, Arab-Americans come primarily from four areas. Over half of the Arab-American population trace their ancestry to Syria and Lebanon. The first wave of Arab-Americans came from these countries in the early 1900s. There has been a new wave of immigration from Lebanon since the Civil War began there in 1975.

Approximately 20 percent of the Arab-American population is made up of Chaldeans from Iraq. They began to arrive in Detroit in the late 1950s following the 1958 revolution. Palestinians make up almost 13 percent of the Arab-American population. The first wave of Palestinian immigration to the Detroit area followed the 1948 catastrophe when virtually all the Arabs were expelled from eastern Palestine. The most recent community is that of the Yemenis who make up 5 percent of the Arab-American population. Many Christian and Muslim denominations are present in Detroit's Arab-American community. Among the Christians are Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Antiochian Orthodox, Coptic and Chaldean. Among the Muslims are Sunni, Shia and Zaydi.

Numbered among Arab-American religious institutions are: St. Maron Maronite Church, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church, St. George Orthodox Church, Mother of God Chaldean Church, St. Mark Coptic Church, St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church, St. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, and the Detroit Islamic Center. Arab-American clubs include: the Beit Hanina Club, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, the American-Arab Chaldean Center, the Iraqi Graduate Society, the Federation of Syrian Orthodox Youth Organizations, the Beqaa League, the American-Yemeni Benevolent Society, the Union of Yemeni Immigrants, the Islamic Association of Greater Detroit, the Arab-American

Human Service Workes' Coalition, the Arab Women's Association, the Jordan Club, the Holy Redemption Club, the El-Bakoor Club, the El-Watan Club, the Ramallah Club, the Palestine Aid Society, the Syrian-Lebanese Cultural Society, and the Syrian Club. Local chapters of national Arab-American groups in Detroit include the ADC, the NAAA, the AAUG.

## Chicago

An estimated 120,000 of Chicago's total population of 3 million are Arab-Americans of various national backgrounds. While Lebanese- and Palestinian-Americans predominate, others trace their roots to Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. A number of churches (Melkite, Maronite and Orthodox) and mosques serve the religious needs of the community. Approximately 85 percent of the Arab-American population is second, third and fourth generation, with immigrants constituting about 15 percent.

Among the churches attended by Chicago's Arab-American population are: Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite, St. George Antiochian Melkite, St. John the Baptist Melkite, St. Michael the Archangel Melkite, and two Chaldean churches. Muslim institutions and places of worship include the Islamic society, the American Islamic College, the Mosque Foundation, the Mosque of Umar, the Islamic Cultural Center, the Islamic Community Center, and the Islamic Society of Northern Illinois University.

Arab-American organizations in Chicago include the Mid-American Arab-American Chamber of Commerce, the Phoenician Club, the Egyptian Club, two Arab-American Ladies' Societies, the Arab Community Center, the Arab-American Congress for Palestine, and the Association for Arab Palestine. There are also local chapters of the United Holy Land Fund, the Ramallah Club, the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, the Palestine Congress of North America, the November 29th Coalition, and the ADC. The Palestine Human Rights Campaign National Office is also located in Chicago. ■



## The Southeast

The combined population of the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, as of 1981, is estimated at 33.1 million. The Arab-American population of this area is estimated at between 60,000-70,000.

Most Arab-Americans in the South trace their roots to Lebanon or Syria. Palestinians comprise the third largest group. Small numbers of Egyptian immigrants are scattered throughout the region, along with a smattering of immigrants from Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf States. The communities divide roughly as follows: Lebanese, 60 percent; Syrian, 22 percent; Palestinians, 10 percent; Egyptians, 3 percent; others, 5 percent. About 15 percent are first generation; 45 percent, second generation; 30 percent, third generation; 10 percent, fourth generation.

Scores of social clubs in the South are associated with the Southern Federation of Syrian-Lebanese American Clubs. Among them are numerous Cedars clubs and others that cater to the local Lebanese and Syrian communities, such as the Al Kareem Club of St. Petersburg, Fla.; the Phoenician Club of Greenville, S.C.; the Syrian-Lebanese American Clubs of Palm Beach and Orlando, Fla.; and many others. In Jacksonville, Fla., there is a sizeable community of Palestinians from Ramallah who meet at the Ramallah-American Club. Those clubs open to persons of any Arab background include the Salaam Club of Jacksonville and the recently formed Middle Eastern Heritage Club of west central Florida.

A partial listing of religious institutions in the South follows: Maronite churches include St. Elias, Birmingham, Ala.; Archangel Michael, Fayetteville, N.C.; St. Joseph, Atlanta, Ga. Melkite churches include St. George, Birmingham, Ala.; St. John Chrysostom, Atlanta, Ga.; Melkite Mission, Miami, Fla. Antiochian Orthodox churches include St. George, Jacksonville, Fla.; St. George, Coral Gables, Fla.; St. Elias, Atlanta, Ga.; St. Mary, West Palm Beach, Fla.; St. Philip, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

There are mosques in Atlanta, Ga.; Birmingham, Ala.; Miami, Fla.; New Orleans, La.; and Charlotte, N.C.

The major national Arab-American organizations have chapters in the larger southern cities. ADC, NAAA, PCNA, ADS, AFRP, ALL and ALSAC are all represented. ■



## Texas

The Arab-American population of Texas, estimated to be about 30,000 is widely scattered in a total state population of more than 14 million.

Many Texan Arab-Americans are descended from settlers from Greater Syria who came around the turn of the century. More recent immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s are Lebanese and Palestinian for the most part, although there are also people from modern Syria and Egypt. Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia are represented by relatively small numbers.

These Texans are highly industrious and prosperous. More than half of the descendants of the original immigrants are college-educated, as are more recent arrivals.

The Arab-American community in Texas asserts pride in its origins, and many activities are centered on religious institutions. As a community, their profile is low, perhaps less so in Houston than in other cities. They are highly assimilated, yet, for many, social life focuses on family and Arab-American friends.

Many Arab-Americans in Texas belong to Orthodox churches: St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Houston; St. Gregory and St. Elias in Austin; St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in El Paso; St. Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church in Dallas; and in Beaumont.

Maronites support St. George Maronite Catholic Church in San Antonio as well as a Maronite mission in Austin. Many Christians belong to Catholic and Episcopal churches, and one Palestinian-American family in Houston attends the Quaker meeting in Houston. There is also a Coptic church, St. Mark's in Houston.

Islamic centers are found in Houston, El Paso, Dallas and Ft. Worth as well as in smaller cities.

Social activities center mainly on the churches, but there are active social clubs as well, particularly in Houston. The Southern Federation of Syrian-Lebanese American Clubs has a strong chapter there. The Jamail Club, the Med Club, the Ramallah and El Nassar clubs are also

active, as is the Palestine Aid Society.

The Arab-American Association of University Graduates (AAUG) and Arab-American Medical Association (AAMA) both have chapters in Houston. ADC's chapter has about 500 members. NAAA recently started a chapter in Dallas and is trying to set up one in Houston as well. There are numerous Palestinian organizations on the university campus.

Arab-American culture is celebrated by the churches, including the Orthodox churches in Houston and El Paso, and the Southern Federation. A Lebanese booth is part of the annual Folklife Festival, and Houston's KPFT boasts a weekly "Arab Hour."

**Arab-Americans in Texas tried to establish themselves in business, freeing themselves from factory life or the hard times of peddling. This 1920 shop of Mansour Farah producing work clothes became the basis for the spectacular success of the Farah Manufacturing Company, maker of Farah Jeans.**



Photo: The Syrian and Lebanese Press





## California

The Arab-American population of California is estimated at between 260,000 and 280,000 in a state where total population is 23,700,000.

The Arab-American population is equally divided between foreign-born immigrants and later generations born in the U.S. The older communities are predominantly Syrian-Lebanese and exist throughout California. Recent immigrants tend to be of two groups—Palestinians, who came to the San Francisco Bay area after 1967, and Yemenis, who are concentrated in the Bay area, Delano and San Joaquin Valley. The larger number of Arab-Americans are Christian, the major denominations being Orthodox, Maronite and Melkite. There are large numbers of Assyrian-Chaldeans who are mainly in Los Angeles, San Diego, Turlock and San Jose. Other nationalities include Egyptians, many of whom live in the Bay area, San Joaquin Valley and Southern California, and Armenian-Lebanese, who are concentrated in Fresno.

Orthodox churches predominate, with three in Los Angeles, one in San Diego and three in the San Francisco Bay area. There are Maronite churches in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and Melkite churches in Los Angeles and Sacramento. Islamic Centers have been established throughout California, but the majority of members are non-Arab. Other religious institutions include Assyrian-Chaldean churches in Turlock, San Jose and Southern California, Coptic churches in Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay area and a Druze Society in Los Angeles.

Groups such as the Arab-American Club of Sacramento, the Arab Cultural Center in the Bay Area, the Arab Community Center in Los Angeles, and the Arab-American Association of Orange County are non-sectarian. Other groups such as the ADC, NAAA, AAUG also attract multi-national Arab-Americans. Prominent humanitarian groups in California include US-OMEN (Organization for Medical and Educational Needs) in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, SIHA (Study of Immigrant Health



Attitudes), which is connected to U.C.-S.F., NAJDA in the Bay Area, which consists of Arab and American women, as does SAWA (Sacramento Arab-American Womens Association) in Sacramento. Throughout California, there exist numerous national groups, the oldest being the Lebanese-Syrian American Society in Los Angeles and the St. Jude Club in the Bay Area. Other major national groups include the Ramallah Club, the American Lebanese League, the Yemeni Association, the Palestine Arab Fund, The Egyptian Cultural Club and the Assyrian Civic Club.

As California has a vast number of university campuses, Arab and Arab-American student groups are relatively visible. Most of the major campuses have an Arab Student Organization, and the majority have one or more national groups. Arab-Americans in business have begun to organize, evidence being the large number of Arab-Americans in the Independent Grocers Association in the Bay Area and the Arab-American Medical and Bar Associations. The U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, which employs many Arab-Americans, has an office in San Francisco, and allows for greater communication between the U.S. and Arab World.





## Western States

In the states of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, North Dakota and Washington, whose total population is estimated at 13.8 million, the Arab-American population is roughly estimated at 45,000.

As in other parts of the United States, the Arab-American population of the area is made up mostly of Christian immigrants from Lebanon and Syria from around the turn of the century. There are also Palestinians, Iraqis and Egyptians, but these are in the minority. Unlike Arab immigrants from many other parts of the country, those who settled in the West came either from Mexico or Canada.

In general the population of the western states is sparse and scattered, with large concentrations in a few cities

such as Denver, Portland, Seattle and Las Vegas. The Arab-American population, about which very little is known, follows this pattern fairly closely. Approximately half of the community in this region can be found in Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington.

There appear to be few religious, social and political institutions in the West to serve the scattered Arab-American community. However there are two churches in Portland catering to the community, the St. Sharbel Maronite Church and St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church. Also in Portland is the Arab-American Community Center. In Denver the Committee for Justice in the Middle East and the Western Federation of Americans of Arab Heritage exist. There are Islamic centers in Denver, Portland and Seattle. ■



**The first convention of the Western Federation of Syrian clubs in 1918 was held in Williston, N.D., one of many early Arab-American communities in Western United States.**

The bustling mining community of Butte, Mont. attracted a large settlement of immigrants from Lebanon before the turn of the century where they earned their living by peddling or owning stores. This was a birthday party for one of the many children of the community, Stephen George (the well-dressed young fellow in the very center of the group).



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# The Way We Were

In this section,  
*ADC Reports* draws upon publications in  
which our forebears found a forum during  
the early decades of this century. Our  
numbers have multiplied since then, and  
we seem to have come so far, but our  
concerns are not so different from those  
from whom we draw our heritage. This is  
part of their legacy to us.  
This is the way we were.



# The Way We Were

THE history of any group of people that exists within a larger group is essentially a chronicle of their ideas and how those ideas coalesce to represent a community of interest. We have chosen the articles reprinted in this section as illustrative of the community of interest that existed within the community of Arab-American immigrants in the early decades of this century.

The publication which, more than any other at the time, set standards of literary excellence and provided an English-language forum for Syrian men and women of letters in this country, and from which many of these articles are drawn, was *The Syrian World*, established by Salloum A. Mokarzel in 1926.

Mokarzel filled his pages with poetry, plays, fiction, essays and reports from the Syrian press "back home." He drew upon the works of such luminaries as Philip K. Hitti and Kahlil Gibran. And he provided an outlet for the work of young, aspiring unknowns as well.

Mokarzel established *The Syrian World* at a time when the unchanging East was changing fast. As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, Syria was marching inexorably from a tradition of feudal authority into an age of discovery and reason and progress. The great ideals for secularization and modernization were nowhere more prominent than among Arab-Americans of Mokarzel's generation. Philip K. Hitti wrote in the pages of *The Syrian World* in 1927 that many Syrians "of the present generation stand perplexed at

the crossing of the roads. Behind them lies a rich and varied heritage of achievement representing ages past. Ahead of them stand the results and products of Western civilization with its blessings and curses, its nationalism, democracy, imperialism, commercialism and progressiveness. What then to preserve of this past inheritance and what to discard?"

We, their sons and daughters, find ourselves asking similar questions, and offer the following articles as testimony to the wit and wisdom of those from whom we draw our heritage. ■

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## "Pioneers"

*In a 1931 issue of The Syrian World an unknown author heralded the "unhonored and unsung" pioneers—the first generation of immigrants*

**W**E who live in this country are constantly reminded of the debt we owe our pioneer fathers.

As this is a new nation we are forever commemorating some historical incident and the persons connected with it. All these things are commonplace to the citizens of a young country as ours, but nonetheless, praise and credit will never cease to be poured into the coffers of those who blazed the trail for our comforts, conveniences, and all that goes with our modern America.

When we think of pioneers, we associate them with those rugged souls who helped build our country. But there is another pioneer to whom we Syrian Americans have let pass "unhonored and unsung." His name is not shouted from the hilltops nor praised in books. Unconsciously, we have relegated him to oblivion. He is not a master of our rich civilization, nor a certain individual that



by commercial standards, for the opportunities they made possible for us are beyond our fondest hopes to repay.

As members of the new generation, we can perpetuate their ideas and ideals, tempered with our American traits. It is through young Syrian clubs that we can acknowledge the debt we owe our fathers. Those who serve the Syrian-American spirit also serve their fathers. Ours can be no ordinary venture, for via these clubs we may let the world know who we are and what we propose to do, for we are but the products of our inheritance. ■

**Most early Arab-American communities were established by travelling peddlers who later chose to settle down and open up businesses in a favorite town or city.**

*Photo: The Syrian and Lebanese Centers*



# “The Syrian in America”

by Dr. Talcott Williams

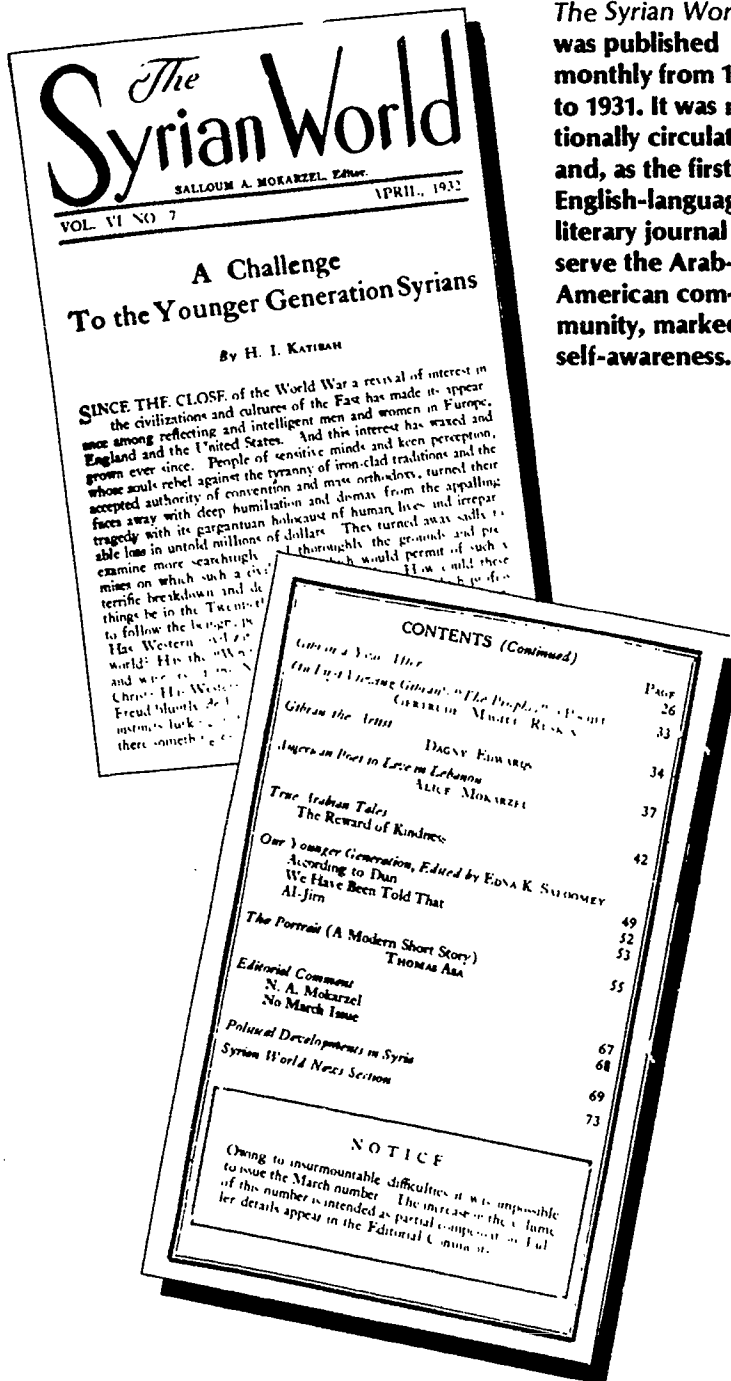
In this 1930 article, one scholar noted the historical importance of the region from which so many early immigrants came, and celebrated the cosmopolitan note that its culture brought America.

**S**YRIA and Syrians constitute the first land and the first people in Southwestern Asia who have entered into modern civilization. They stand alone in this. If Syria were an islanded-land, instead of being four thousand years a thoroughfare of conquering peoples, swept by many tides, it would be, in its place, as striking an example of progress as Japan.

The Syrians have in the last seventy years added a new chapter to the loftier tone of the Arabic literature. I can myself remember seeing even Moslem eyes brighten as the poems of Nasif el Yaziji were adequately read. A new field of fiction has been created in Syria which influences the Arab world as a whole. Modern journalism in Arabic has been almost wholly created by Syrians. A Syrian edits the organ of the Shareef of Mecca, who sits in the seat of Muhammad. The leading magazine at Cairo, foremost in the Arab world, was brought into being by Syrians. Wherever there are newspapers in Arabic, they are generally [tho] not always, edited by Syrians. The new literature of the Arab tongue, in science, in history, in the discussion of modern issues, is by no means as large, as effective or as widespread as the like literature in the newly awakened peoples between the Aegean and the Baltic, but the output of Syria on modern topics and the progress of to-day exceeds that of any land or people in Southwestern Asia.

This is not due simply to access and position. Egypt has access and position as

The Syrian World was published monthly from 1926 to 1931. It was nationally circulated and, as the first English-language literary journal to serve the Arab-American community, marked its self-awareness.



much as Syria. Persia has as lofty a tradition. Intellectual ability is still high in Mesopotamia. Narrow as is its intellectual tradition, cramped as it has been by fanaticism, yet no one can fail to see that the Khanates have powerfully influenced Moslem legalism. Let us not forget, this is one of the great systems of law, the weight of whose codes, statutes, traditions, decisions and precedents are still cited and argued, and establish property and personal rights, from the Judicial Committee of Privy Council of Westminster to the far-flung fringing palms of the Malaysian Archipelago.

But the trading instinct of the Phoenician has carried the Syrian trader over both North and South America as well as Africa and Southern Asia. He has penetrated to the head-waters of the Amazon, he is to be found in all parts of the West coast of Latin America and more than one national legislature and city ordinance has acknowledged the superior commercial ability of the Syrian by trying to exclude him altogether. The trade of Brazil passes more and more into his hands and every year there appear at Beirut from the very ends of the Western world and the outer Eastern coast of Asia, the sons of the alumni of the American University at Beirut.

This cosmopolitan note lends

significance and weight to the Syrian migration of our day. I know no American city where I have not spoken Arabic and no port on the gulf or the Caribbean where the Syrian is absent.

No melting pot is the United States. It never has and it never will reduce our population to a common amalgam. The stocks of many European peoples and most of the Mediterranean races have been grafted on our national stock. There they will remain and retain their old life, strength, genius and flavor. They all, if they abide in belief in liberty, shall be grafted in and grow, maintaining an identity through centuries to come.

So after three centuries, Hollander, Huguenot, men of the Palatinate and both banks of the Rhine, of Brittany and of Sweden and Switzerland retain their identity in their descendants. A like service has Dr. Philip K. Hitti done in his book "The Syrians in America." His intimate acquaintance with Syrian immigration, his sympathy with the life from which this addition to American life comes, all these things enable him to understand, to appreciate and to describe the Syrian in America. For all these Syrian traditions I have the deepest sympathy. There I was born and there to-day the youngest of my father's descendants are passing their childhood days.

**Before he moved to Birmingham, Khattar Wheby had been trained as a teacher in Lebanon. When he arrived in the United States he turned to peddling as a means of livelihood. When it was decided in Birmingham that the children of the settlers needed to be educated in the language and ways of the old country, Khattar became the likely choice to teach them. Seen here with Khattar is his first Arabic speaking class in 1915.**

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Photo: Brenda McCallum. American Folk Life Center, Library of Congress

# "A Challenge to the Younger Generation Syrians"

by H.I. Katibah

*In a cautionary article in 1932, Katibah, a leading figure in the community, warned the children of immigrants not to reject their "birthright," to know their ethnic history and to "make something of a talent handed you by Providence instead of burying it timidly in the soil."*

**S**INCE the close of the World War, a strong and acute interest in the East and things Eastern has been stirred in intellectual centers of the West. And the East, with its more mature view of life, with its instinctive emphasis on those human values which make for happiness and

contentment, with its renewed vigor and forward-looking progressive outlook on the future, with its determined efforts to create local cultures preserving all the good elements of progress which have carried the West a long distance ahead of the East in material comfort and supremacy, is more and more in the minds of serious Western thinkers and writers of our present generation. Back of that interest, we think, is the feeling that East and West have mutually supplementary forces and elements necessary for a complete and wholesome life, be it social or individual.

If that is the case, and there is no doubt in our mind that it is, then a special duty, a special moral obligation, we believe, rests on the shoulders of a class of people who live amongst us in these United States. If this duty, this obligation, is shirked by them, then a great spiritual opportunity would have been missed by them, an opportunity which others, perhaps less qualified, would take up and exploit. More than that, a great chance for creative thinking and for contributing something worthwhile to the



Photo: Bodleian Library, London

heterogenous and rich culture of this country, will pass from their hands.

It is needless for me to say that I have in mind the younger generation of Syrians born and brought up in this country. I have in mind the second-generation Syrians of whom the late Gibran said:

*"I believe that you have inherited from your forefathers an ancient dream, a song, a prophecy, which you can proudly lay as a gift of gratitude upon the lap of America."*

It is the new generation of Syrians in whose veins the blood of the intrepid, adventurous Phoenicians and proud Arabs courses through, and whom the beloved poet of the Cedars earnestly and pleadingly charged "to stand before the towers of New York, Washington, Chicago, and San Francisco saying in your heart, 'I am the descendant of a people that builded Damascus, and Biblus, and Tyre and Sidon, and Antioch, and now I am here to build with you, and with a will.'"

The once accepted view of Americanization, which essayed to melt the different racial characteristics and differences into one homogenous amalgam, and for which "the melting pot"

was an appropriate symbol, is giving way to a more natural, more vital conception, one truer to life and its laws of growth. According to this latter conception the racial differences are not considered as undesirable elements to be eliminated, but as desirable ones to be incorporated in the living body of the American nation. The colorless, standardized unity gives place to a rich variety in unity. True assimilation of the foreign groups within the body politic of this country, which this writer has consistently and persistently advocated, does not mean the absorption of one racial element by another. It means, rather, the interaction of those different elements to produce therefrom a wholesome unity rich in the contributions of the best and most beautiful in all the races that threw their lot with the New World.

Hegel once predicted in his *Philosophy of History* that the destiny of the world will one day be determined on the shores of the New World. This prophecy is being fulfilled in our own days, and before our own eyes, but not for the same reasons advanced by the German philosopher.



Photo: Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris



Instead of a bloody war contending for the only land still available for conquest and exploitation by overcrowded nations, a new world idea, a world unity through international understanding and international amity is the one distinguishing mark of American leadership today which is holding the only ray of hope to a distracted and haggard world.

And what a role the different nationals enrolled under the banner of the Stars and Stripes could play in this gripping drama, in the realization of this glorious dream, could be left to the imagination of the perspicacious reader. But it is only those who have travelled in Europe and the different countries of the East and studied for themselves the amazing and tremendous penetration of American influence abroad who could fully realize the extent of that influence.

Undoubtedly the lion's share in this spiritual conquest of America falls to American citizens of foreign extraction who had returned to live in the countries of their origin or those who have translated into their different national languages the spirit and technique of American democracy and American culture, the spirit of youthful adventure, of buoyant optimism and undaunted courage. One of the first things that attracted my attention in the East was "the Americanization" of the Arabic press,

an Americanization which is effected not in a semi-conscious effort of imitation, but with a fully conscious realization of the process of adaptation and its application to local needs and local problems. The Arabic illustrated weekly, patterned after the popular American publications, is blazing its way, brushing aside the cobwebs of tardy traditions, enlightening the popular mind to social evils, oddities and scandals, arousing the dormant conscience of reform in serious-minded citizens, and reaching quarters of human response which the more literary organs left completely untouched.

This is a phase of the Americanization or democratization of the world for which the younger Syrian-American generation, happily or unhappily, is not called upon to shoulder. Most of the second generation Syrians born in this country hardly know enough Arabic to carry on a kitchen conversation with their grandmothers, and perhaps a limited few could pen a letter in Arabic to their cousins in Syria or Lebanon without committing a dozen mistakes or more on the same page.

But this does not exempt the younger Syrians from a service which they owe to the country of their adoption, a country to which they have pledged fealty and undivided loyalty.

Paradoxical as it may seem, this service consists in their being better Syrians than they usually like to admit. It is in assimilating, as they alone can admirably do, the spiritual culture of the East, in whose subsoil their very roots are deeply imbedded, and presenting it in their daily lives, their social intercourse, the spoken and the written word, in such a manner that the average American can readily understand and appreciate.

Is it not pathetic that while American university students, boys and girls of Puritan origin, or descendants of American pioneers who trekked to the Middle West and the Pacific Coast states in their covered wagons, ransack the musty books of history to write about Mohammed Ali Pasha, a Tamerlane, a Harun-ar-Rashid, our younger Syrian generation should avoid the study of Arabic and things Arabian from a subconscious feeling of inferiority, or lest

Ceramic folk art displayed in a Palestinian exhibit in 1983 in Washington, D.C. at the Rayburn Bldg., U.S. House of Representatives.



Photo: Alan Dehmer



their Americanization be challenged?

A few weeks ago I happened to speak informally before a group of second-generation Syrians in Boston. I told them briefly of the tremendous renaissance movement going on today in the Arabic-speaking countries, notably Egypt. It was encouraging and inspiring to see their eyes open wide with interest and amazement as I told them of the trend in religious liberalism in Islam, of the feminist movement in the land of harems, of the inroad of industrialism into the ancient lands of artisan guilds and enslaved fellahin, of labour unions and agrarian cooperative societies in the Valley of the Nile, in Damascus, Beirut and Baghdad, of the introduction of the motor pump and labour-saving machineries into countries where the human hand did all the work before. They asked intelligent questions, and took down names of books dealing with such subjects. But what surprised me in turn was the fact that these things had not been known to them before; that they showed as little knowledge, or if we are inclined to be less charitable, as much abysmal ignorance about the countries of their forefathers and ancestors as the average American boys and girls from Maine or Vermont.

Forget for the nonce that you are Syrians of Syrian extraction. Let us assume that you are as American as George Washington and Calvin Coolidge themselves, and that there is not the least trace of foreign accent or mannerism in your speech and behaviour, that you are perfectly predestined and preconditioned to the American social life. Let us assume all this and keep in mind that there is today in America, in Europe, in England, a keen interest in countries and cultures which just *happened* to be those of your fathers and forefathers. Is it not the most logical thing in the world that you should be the ones of all God's creatures to take advantage of this interest, to exploit it to its utmost limits, to take hold of assets which were given you as a birthright, and make something of a talent handed you by Providence instead of burying it timidly in the soil, looking furtively to the right and left as you do lest you be caught with that talent in your hand? ■

## Who's Who in Utica

### Where the Blue-Eyed Saxon is Finding Himself in the Minority

*In September 1917, this feature story appeared in the Utica Saturday Globe heralding the presence in the community of a distinctive new element.*

**T**HINK not, oh blue-eyed Saxon, that you are altogether and irrevocably it. You must have been impressed if you have any brains and perceptions, in reading the army draft lists with the predominance of "foreign" names. Did their significance penetrate your intelligence, or has your splendid isolation with your kind made you impervious to the fact that you are outnumbered?

I don't know exactly why we call them "foreign" names either. They are about as foreign as Smith and Jones were to the Van Dams and Van Horsts of a couple of centuries ago. It's a fact, if we may rely on the veracity of chroniclers, that "some of our best families" then, as they came straggling over from Connecticut into New Netherlands, were considered the rankest sort of outsiders—just common, slab-sided Yankees.

Pretty soon the Van Dams and Van Antwerps and the rest of the Low Dutch of New Netherlands found their progeny outnumbered by the progeny of the nimble-witted Yankee, with their wooden nut-megs and their inveterate tendency to swap and strike bargains.

And then there came another day.

And the offspring of the "common Connecticut Yankees" found themselves "the real old families." Then they woke up one morning in June to find the papers filled with column after column of draft

registration names which looked queer and sounded queer. In one list they ended in "witz"; in another they ended in "ski." Those unpronounceable foreign names. Their children shall inherit the land—not because they are necessarily superior to your children, but because they are more numerous. Your children, oh blue-eyed Saxon, proud of their heritage of a hundred or two hundred or three hundred years of ancestry back to the Mayflower, back to old England—your children will be falling in love with the black-eyed, black haired children whose fathers and mothers toil.

And these have no heritage?

### They Bring A Rich Heritage

Aye, that they have. When your ancestors were dwelling in the fens, wearing the skins of beasts, killing wild animals with their huge clubs and dragging their not unwilling brides from their fathers' caves by their long fair tresses, the forebears of these strange people who have come to us were wearing the silk of the Orient, were dwelling in houses and worshipping in temples whose architecture of the world has not since excelled, producing literatures and philosophies and works of art that still are standards.

Oh yes, these people have a heritage more ancient than yours.

Delve into your own city. Get out of your beaten track. Get acquainted with your new neighbors. Don't think yourself superior. There are surprises ahead for you.

Go with me to where Cottage Place leads. It's mighty easy to call them "Polocks." I can take you to the upper flat of a neat little house, as comfortably furnished as your own, where a Polish man will seat himself at the piano and play Chopin for you and disclose the beauties of the little known folk songs of that composer.

Ignorant Polander?

He can converse in French, Russian, English and a number of dialects peculiar to the place of his nativity. How many languages can you speak?



### Ancestry Back to Solomon

Those queer marks on the windows of stores down on Bleecker Street—what are they?

They don't appear like Hebrew. What are they, anyway?

They are the characters of one of the oldest tongues on earth. These strange cryptic things, like a cross between shorthand and the tracks of a fly, fresh from an ink bottle—these are possibly the same sort of letters which the Man of Galilee one day wrote with his finger in the sand. For in all probability Christ spoke the Aramaic language, which is closely akin to what the 2,500 Syrians in Utica speak today.

Ancient? Some of them can trace an ancestry back to the days of Solomon, when Hiram of Tyre undertook the



contract of furnishing lumber for the temple at Jerusalem. Proud? What have you to be proud of, whose race story is lost in darkness at the beginning of Christianity, compared with the Syrians who dwelt on Mount Lebanon and whose history stretches back 4,000 or 5,000 years? These are Americans.

Have you ever drunk Turkish coffee, that thick, strong coffee from Arabia with these your Syrian neighbors? Have you ever fallen under the spell of the bubbling Turkish pipes on the floor which men of Syria smoke through long tubes? Have you smelled the odor of the Turkish tobacco, which they import in leaf? Here's Bagdad, and Araby, the blest brought to your very door.

Hear their music and heed their stories.

They will tell you, many of them, "We

could get along in the old country; but we wanted freedom!" It is the burning of the same fire that drove the Pilgrims over here, the same fire that made the colonists fight, the same fire that drives us into war today, the fire of human liberty that sent them hither, to find a place where they could toil and own a piece of God's green earth for their very own, where their children could have a chance to learn and live, and where they could lift free hands to the blue sky of heaven—this brought them here, and are they not as worthy to share the heritage as those who came earlier, will they not be as good Americans? ■



Weddings were major events in the Arab-American community, where old traditions, rituals and special holiday foods defined the special day. As much as they preserved tradition and reinforced family ties, the marriages also marked a transition toward assimilation to a new society.

Photo: Brenda McCallum, American Folk Life Center, Library of Congress

# Marriages and Funerals

In her book *Arab Americans and their Communities of Cleveland*, Mary Macron writes of the customs that buffered Arab immigrants from the powerful tides of Americanization. She charts Arab life in Cleveland from the first major wave, 1890-1910, when villagers from the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon and nearby areas came to the industrial heartland city. The new immigrants worked in factories, set up stores and sold crafts, making their way in the new world without losing touch with the old. With the gracious permission of the Cleveland State University's Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, ADC Issues number 7 offered to members selections from Macron's book. Excerpted below are two passages from that anthology.

Mary Macron, one of ADC's earliest members and strongest supporters, passed away in 1981. Her essay was edited for publication by David Hamod.

## The Wedding

**W**HEN a suitable match was made, the community could look forward to celebrating another important institution: marriage. A marriage took months to prepare for and days to celebrate. It was a bond that united not only the couple, but the families.

The family of the groom would come to the father of the bride to ask for her hand long before the groom was permitted to meet publicly with the girl. Often the marriage itself was preceded by a betrothal ceremony some six months to a year before, in which the young couple would appear before the priest, in the church, in the presence of both families and selected guests.

Certain formalities would be exchanged between the families, promises were made by the young man and young woman, and the priest would bless the engagement ring. Sometimes the young man did not even have the pleasure of

slipping the ring on his beloved's finger. This might be done by the priest or the father of the groom.

The betrothal ceremony gave the young couple the privilege of walking out together and being seen in public with a chaperone. They could go to some social functions, shop together for their new household, and get to know each other a little better throughout the year of courtship which would prepare them for the marriage that would follow.

A broken engagement was not to be taken lightly. In such a case, this betrothal, blessed by the priest, had been betrayed, and protocol demanded that the priest himself be required to dissolve the arrangement. Most often, the onus fell upon the young woman and jeopardized her chances for another match. Was she irresponsible? Was she too proud? Was she extravagant? Never mind that a woman of integrity, realizing that this young man was not her ideal mate for a lifetime, might insist upon breaking the contract. Never mind. This girl was considered extremely difficult to please or to understand, too willful, too demanding. Better to look elsewhere.

This betrothal ritual, much the same in all Eastern rites (although not practiced by later generation Arab-Americans), closely resembled the Islamic ritual still universally observed. This is called *Katbit il-Kitaab*, the Writing of the Book. It is a marriage contract, in which the young woman and young man are considered man and wife, except that their physical union takes place only after the bride leaves her father's house to enter the groom's home to live. The Muslim young people, too, are accorded in this ceremony the privilege of walking out and going to entertainment together, and preparing, during this year of pre-marriage, their trousseau and home. This contract is even more binding upon them than is the Christian betrothal, for a broken contract is considered a divorce, and the young man must pay to the father of the bride the dowry sum agreed upon so that she will not be forced to remain in her father's home without means and dignity. In times past, it would have been most unlikely that the girl would get a second offer.

AS the wedding date drew near, a wave of excitement rippled through the whole community. Everyone knew nearly everyone else, friendships carrying over from the days of village life before coming to America. Customs carried over, too, and tradition was preserved and continued into the new life.

One of these Middle Eastern customs was *el-Leilat el-Ghosal*, when the bride was given a special party by all the girls and women, much like the spinsters' night in the American custom. This was a night when the men were excluded, and they might hold a party of their own for the bridegroom.

The feminine contingent would all bustle down the street to the bride's home, singing that spontaneous chant, the *zaghloot*, which praised the bride's attributes and wished upon her health, wealth, a happy home, a loving husband, and at least a dozen children—most of them sons. The bride's mother would meet them at the door with a dignified welcome, and only after all were seated would the bride enter the room, attended by her sisters and radiant in her new finery.

There would be much laughter. The older ladies, enjoying the feminine intimacy, would exchange stories about their own weddings and their total ignorance of all things connubial. Each would direct a sly remark toward the bride at which all the others would laugh heartily. The bride would blush and they would all laugh again.

"When my own wedding feast was over," said one, "and everyone was leaving the house of my husband's father, I put on my hat and prepared to go back home with my sister. 'No,' she said to me, 'you stay here, this is now your home.' And there I was with a husband I hardly knew. I was tired, and I didn't know where I was to sleep that night." Then with a smile grown soft with years of acceptance, she said, "I soon found out."

And from another: "In my day, there was not all this picking and choosing. They just told us, and that's who it was. Not everyone was as lucky as you, my girl. Think of this one you're getting. Already he has a stand in the market, and look at



those shoulders, and those eyes a woman could drown in. I tell you if I were younger, I would run away from my husband if your bridegroom had a brother." "And what would you do, old grandmother," laughed another, "hold him in your lap and feed him grapes?"

Before the wedding feast, all the women from the bridegroom's family (for the wedding was given by the man's side) would spend days preparing great trays of sweets—*baklava*, *sambousek*, *mahmoul*, *ghraibeh*—rich with butter and syrups and filled with pistachios, walnuts or dates. There would be mounds of nutmeats, and candies imported from New York—*raha*, which was similar to the Greek *loukoumi*, and apricot squares, sugared and pistachioed. Long tables would be set up to hold the chicken and pilaf, stuffed grape leaves, *kousa* (white squash filled with rice and chopped meat), and *kibbee* (lamb, pounded and pulverized in a large marble basin, and mixed with cracked wheat and seasonings). Vegetables were scrubbed and washed for *salata*, a salad mixed with lemon and olive oil. Huge round sheets of bread were tossed to paper thinness over the flying arms of the expert women bakers. The bread was baked for the feasting only hours before the great moment.

ON the morning of the wedding, these same women, who had worked through the night over the stoves and ovens, would dress in their finest clothing. With their husbands and children they would form an entourage to the bride's house to bring her to the church. Singing with joy, they would come to the bride's family who would meet them with something less than a show of enthusiasm. It was not proper to demonstrate any overt pleasure when giving up a daughter to another's household. There would be a cool politeness, which the groom's family understood, since they themselves had to observe the same proprieties when the groom's sister married.

The bride's mother would weep and the bride's father would bite his lip as the

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igh and shed more tears. This is girl I dressed and now another takes her from me to her own one thought to herself. Oh, will her well, this daughter, whom I from the breath of the wind? groom's mother, as if reading thoughts, would then glance fully at the bride's mother as if to ve I not a daughter of my own have given to another woman's have no fear, sister, I will bring no this girl of yours." As if to prove could draw proudly from around neck a gold chain, placing it the bride's throat, a symbol and a The bride's mother would sigh peacefully now that all the ies had been observed. t the moment came. The bride d seated, while both mothers mportantly with her veil. Finally,



Photo: The Syrian World

when it had been adjusted to everyone's satisfaction, all the women would chant their happy song and bring the bride out before the entire company. The women of both families would receive flowers from the bridegroom's mother, and the men would also choose some for their lapels. Then the bride, her parents, and the attendants would take their places in the hired carriage and start off for the church.

The wedding was long, for after the lengthy Mass, the ceremony uniting the young couple might last another hour. The rings were blessed with much chanting, and crowns were placed upon the heads of bride and groom—blessed and interchanged three times—as the cantor sang and the priest prayed over them. The priest would then lead the couple around the alter and along the aisles of the church, all the while chanting the nuptial liturgy and swinging the thurible vigorously as the sweet and heavy vapors of incense filled the air.

As the priest completed the ceremony and bent down to congratulate the bride and groom, an exultant *zaghloot* would ring out in the little church, easing the solemnity of the long and symbolic ceremony. "Now good," an old grandfather would be heard to say. "Praise God, we have them married; let's get on to the feast." He would rise up in his pew, giving the signal for all to follow.

**T**HE bridal feast was served in the bridegroom's house by all the women of the family—the old and dignified matrons and every young girl who could carry a platter without spilling its contents. Group after group of diners sat down and rose up from the table, each in the order of his social position. The bride and groom were seated together at the head, the priest at their side, the fathers, grandfathers, elderly uncles and cousins, the mother and grandmother of the bride, and a few old friends whom time had given a position of community respect. At the first table, too, would be the adult guests from other cities. A Cleveland wedding might draw company from every city in Ohio, and sometimes even from New York, Detroit and Chicago.



This oil painting was done in "the Lebanese fashion," in the early years of this century.

The tables were set and reset until all had been fed. At last the children were called, their Sunday clothing dusty from play in the street. Fed and given their share of sweets, they would then join the other guests, seated and standing in a great semicircle around a dais, on which the bride and groom accepted the good wishes of the company.

Men from the groom's family gathered before the bridal couple. The leader waved a handkerchief as the group danced the quick and emphatic *dabke*, the age-old folk dance of every festive occasion. They stood before the young people, their hands upon each other's shoulders, singing extempore. They praised the bride's beauty and virtue, the groom's nobility and manly attributes, and the parents' respect among all their friends. Loud and long, in joyous expression, their voices rang out to the street. Later, the bride's relatives, not to be outdone, composed even longer songs which were more lavish in their praise, their voices rising to echo and mingle with

all the memories of the house.

For so many of those people who could not read or write, extempore versing was a preservation of the poetry and music of generations, each adding, improvising and embellishing. As the first untutored generation died away, these verses were lost. The men rhymed their extempore not only at weddings, but on every festive occasion. They were singers, these men, and poets, and all the human emotions found expression in those strong voices.

The women, too, vied with each other to compose beautiful chants. Rhyming and lilting, laughter and joy were captured on a golden chain of words ending in the pealing, exultant cry of the *zaghloot*. "La la la lu lu lu l'aishe!" "To life," they sang, "to life." An Arab wedding was not just a family event, a community occasion, and a weekend of festivities. It was rather, a command performance. Everyone had to sing, everyone had to dance.

Before the immigrants learned to sing the American national anthem, they sang the song of Syrian independence long years before independence became a reality. They sang this song at every wedding, and later generations, who learned not one word of Arabic, can still remember those phrases of patriotism sung out by their grandparents. "Enthee Souria ya biladi." "Thou art Syria, my country." Love songs and ballads from home were sung and tears of remembrance glistened in the eyes of the guests as they applauded the singer.

The *oud*, that pear-shaped instrument, thrummed its plaintive, yearning notes against homesick hearts. It said to the bride and groom, "Young lovers, sing and be happy! Can you know what lies ahead of your feet? Sing and be happy, young lovers, tomorrow and tomorrow, and tomorrow will come only too soon."

Now the *derbecki* took its turn, this old drum with its stretched goat skin. It was tapped, knocked, and slapped with a gentle hand, light and swift. Let it be thumped by fingers that can pull shouts from its throat, and let the young girls dance, their slender arms graceful as the willow in the lake, their feet disciplined in each exquisite turn.

How many a small grandchild . . . ran screaming and wailing down the street, tugging and pulling at the suitcase and carpet bag, pleading with *Jidouh* not to go but to stay, to stay?

## The Passing

JUST as there were tears of joy at weddings, there were tears of sorrow at the passing away of a loved one. An old grandfather, having stayed a few years, would be leaving America to spend his last moments on his own bit of land, anxious to be buried in the mother soil. When someone, young or old, made plans to return to the old country, the farewell was one of terrible grief. This was a funereal moment, for a return almost certainly meant a parting forever from the loved ones in this land. The farewells were loud and agonized, and songs of lament would be heard along the street and from the balconies. Because transportation was not a matter of a few hours and money was not had easily, most of those early arrivals had come to spend the rest of their lives in the new country; those who returned, returned forever. How many a small grandchild,

sensing that this parting would be forever, ran screaming and wailing down the street, tugging and pulling at the suitcase and carpet bag, pleading with *Jidouh* not to go but to stay, to stay? How many a grandfather tore the sob from his throat in that last embrace?

Letters from the village or town often brought news of an illness or death in the family. Everyone would be sick with anxiety and grief, for this marked another parting and loss, the beloved face and voice to be seen and heard no more, and "here we are thousands of miles across the sea, without a last glance, without a last word."

The elderly family members who remained in America would not go to the hospital, for to go to the hospital meant one was close to death. If one had to die, then let it be in his own bed with his loved ones standing around him so that he could direct them as to his last wishes and admonish them to be loving and watchful of one another. What they prayed and hoped for often happened. Everyone in the family would come to visit the old one, respectfully kissing the old hand, receiving the blessing from this beloved grandparent.

Wakes were held in the family house. For three nights, the women would sit up all night in the parlor, saying their goodbyes, and remembering all the days of their youth. They would weep a great deal, and then one, to lighten the grief, would make a little joke, or remember something funny that the departed relative had said or done. All the women would smile, concealing their little laughs behind tear-soaked handkerchiefs. They sat on straight, hard chairs, prayed a little, talked a little, and dozed a little, but there was no thought of going to their own house and leaving the bereaved alone. The men, too, sat together, heads bowed, silent and remembering.

Softly, softly, the *zaghloot*, now chanting the attributes of the beloved lost one, and remembering the happier times in this final farewell, would murmur mournfully through the house; all, the men and the women, would fall to weeping.

## Red Wool For A Dress

*A grandmother from Utica told this story to her son.*

**Y**OUR grandfather Roshide received a letter from Uncle Habib who was in the United States. The letter contained questionable statements against the Turkish government which was the power in Lebanon in 1914. So Ami Roshide was called to Istanbul for questioning, and there was the fear that he could be sentenced to hard labor for life or even sentenced to death.

The whole village turned out to bid him goodbye with tears and advice. Your grandmother, wiping her tears, said, "Roshide, if you find a nice, red woolen material, bring me enough to make a dress."

Of course the villagers sneered and said, "Is that all she can be thinking of?"

But your grandmother was a wise woman. She spoke words of encouragement to your grandfather to let him know she was expecting him home again and would wait.

And so it was—he did come home. And yes, she got her red wool for a dress.



Photo: Columbia University Library, New York

## The Coffee House Raid

by Eugene Paul Nassar

*In Utica, N.Y., in the early part of this century, the Syrian men gathered in the coffee houses to speak of religion and gardens, while their wives were obliged to wait alone at home. In this vignette excerpted from Wind of the Land, by Eugene Paul Nassar, two of the more spirited wives attempted to convince the men that their time would be better spent at home.*

**M**ANY years ago, Mike's wife and Joe's wife were young brides, and like all young brides, they were possessive of their husbands. They did not much like this Ah'we business in the evenings. It was all right in the old country where there were only a handful of houses in the village. But this was America; things were large and strange, and they wanted their husbands around, as the "American" women had in the magazines. Several of the women met together one evening and inspired by the courage of "Mart Mike" (Mike's wife), they called the police anonymously, and told them of a gambling den on Elizabeth Street (which of course, the police, like all police, knew about from the day it opened).

So the Ah'we was raided, the nickels and dimes picked up, and twelve Lebanese men were brought in the police wagon to face a most well known magistrate, Judge Buckley. Now Judge Buckley knew all these men; he was a fine Irish-American of middle years who knew everyone. Still the men of the Ah'we, notorious and hardened gamblers as they were, feared the Law, about which they knew nothing.

"Well, Joe. How shall I put your name down on my sheet?"

"Joe Ketchum."

"Joe Ketchum? Why, I thought your name was Joe Kassouf!"

"No, Joe Ketchum."

"I see. And you, Mike Nassar, how do I spell your name?"

"Mike Barood."

"Now, Mike, come on! You and I both know Mike Barood. Do you want to give him a bad name? Poor Mike Barood and his family, when they see his name in the paper tomorrow."

"All right, put down James Buckley."

"I will not. I'll put down Mike Nassar, Mike Nassar *senior*. How about you, Abe?"

"M'befhemsh Inglisi."

"Citizens of the United States! You should be ashamed of yourselves! Five dollars and one night in jail. And I'm doing you a favor putting you all up on the city, because your wives will not let you in the house tonight."

The men were put up in a long room like a dormitory with bars on the windows. Immediately they began to play pinochle. But by twelve o'clock they were tired of playing, yet far too excited to sleep. They called upon Abdullah Maroon to sing. Abdullah truly had the reputation anywhere in the Lebanese world as the finest and one of the last singers of *ataba*. One improvised and sang alliterative poetry on any subject that came to mind

or was asked for by his listeners. It was like prophecy to the Lebanese; few now were born with the inventiveness, the vocabulary, the inspiration. Abe sang in church the appointed ritual, but he, like all the others, acknowledged Abdullah the master of the song and poetry that comes from the depths of the spontaneous heart.

Abdullah had no education and no money. He drove a banana truck for a living, and when he was asked to travel all over the United States to sing at weddings, funerals, and births, he asked only train fare and then some Arak, the arabic anisone, to help him start, to give him the words he did not have in his ordinary speech. He would put his hand to the side of his head, as he did now among the pinochle players in the city jail, and moan, "oof, oof, oo oo oo oo oof!" And then he would begin, as he did now:

Lebanon, land of our birth and  
hopefully of our dying,  
We, thy exiled sons, are disgraced in  
the foreign land,  
Confined we are by the oppressor,  
The sun and wind are denied us,  
Also our game of pinochle.  
oof! (says the audience)

*Wind of the Land was first published in the United States by  
The Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc.  
© 1978 Eugene Paul Nassar*



In the "Southend" enclave of Arab-Americans, factory workers, the jobless, and new immigrants alike meet in local coffee houses to converse, play cards and pass the time.

**"Be  
proud of being  
an American,  
but also be  
proud that your  
fathers and  
mothers came  
from a land  
upon which  
God laid His  
precious hand  
and raised His  
messengers."**

## **"I Believe in You"**

**by Kahlil Gibran**

*In this first issue of The Syrian World, Kahlil Gibran addressed "young Americans of Syrian origin":*

**I** believe in you, and I believe  
in your destiny.  
I believe that you are  
contributors to this new  
civilization

I believe that you have inherited from  
your forefathers an ancient dream, a song,  
a prophecy, which you can proudly lay as a  
gift of gratitude upon the lap of America.

I believe you can say to the founders  
of this great nation, "Here I am, a youth, a  
young tree whose roots were plucked  
from the hills of Lebanon, yet I am deeply  
rooted here, and I would be fruitful."

And I believe that you can say to  
Abraham Lincoln, the blessed, "Jesus of  
Nazareth touched your lips when you  
spoke, and guided your hand when you  
wrote; and I shall uphold all that you have  
said and all that you have written."

I believe that you can say to Emerson  
and Whitman and James, "In my veins  
runs the blood of the poets and wise men  
of old, and it is my desire to come to you  
and receive, but I shall not come with  
empty hands."

I believe that even as your fathers  
came to this land to produce riches, you  
were born here to produce riches by  
intelligence, by labor.

And I believe that it is in you to be  
good citizens.

And what is it to be a good citizen?

It is to acknowledge the other person's  
rights before asserting your own, but  
always to be conscious of your own.

It is to be free in thought and deed,  
but it is also to know that your freedom is



subject to the other person's freedom.

It is to create the useful and the beautiful with your own hands, and to admire what others have created in love and with faith.

It is to produce wealth by labor and *only* by labor, and to spend less than you have produced that your children may not be dependent on the state for support when you are no more.

It is to stand before the towers of New York, Washington, Chicago and San

Francisco saying in your heart, "I am the descendant of a people that builded Damascus, and Biblus, and Tyre and Sidon, and Antioch, and now I am here to build with you, and with a will."

It is to be proud of being an American, but it is also to be proud that your fathers and mothers came from a land upon which God laid his gracious hand and raised His messengers.

Young Americans of Syrian origin, I believe in you. ■

**The town of  
Becharre,  
Lebanon, was  
Kahlil Gibran's  
first home.**

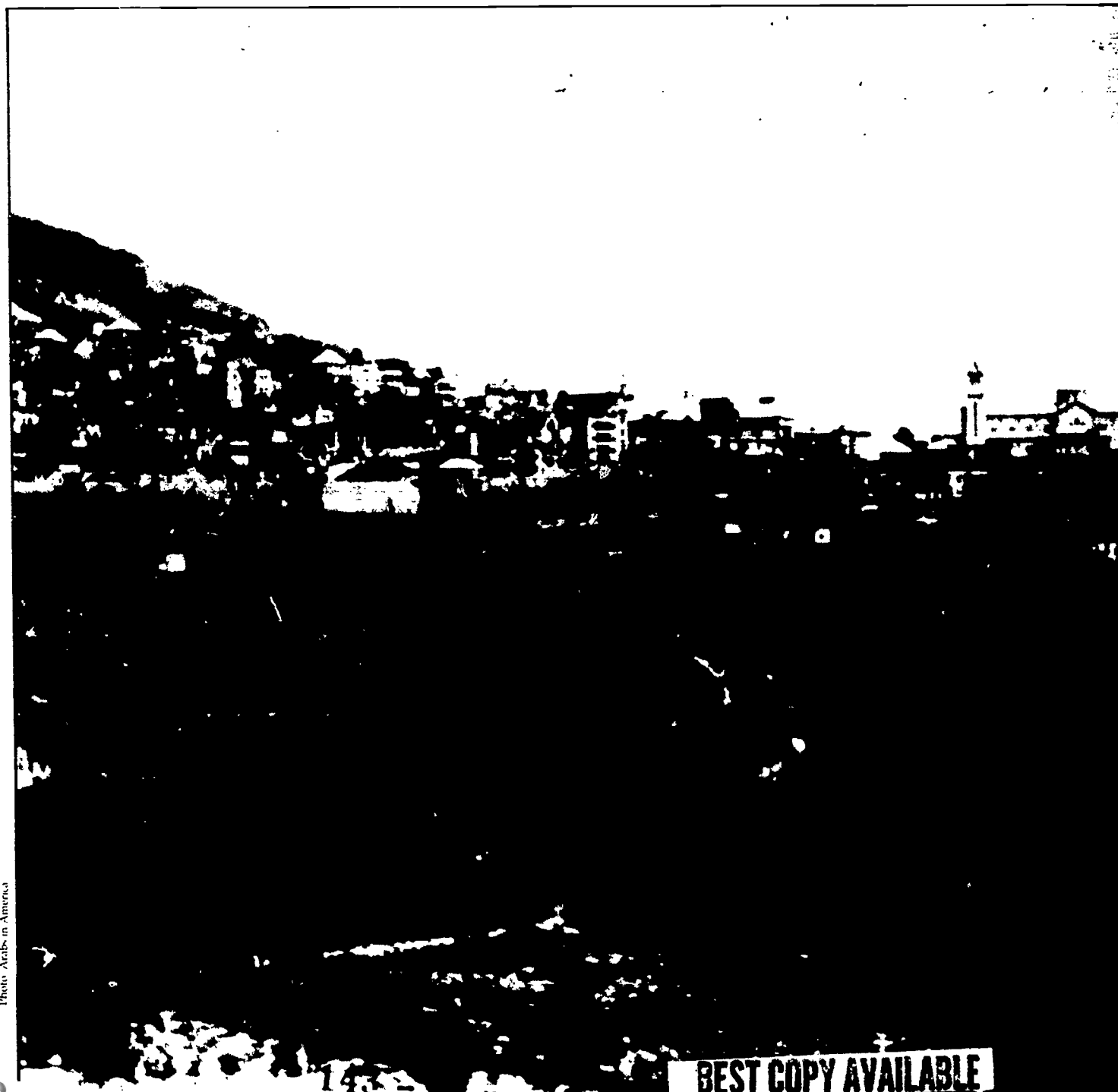


Photo: Arabs in America

**BEST COPY AVAILABLE**

# Regional Survey Questionnaire

ADC is inaugurating an on-going project to survey the characteristics of the American Arab population. We want to know more about ourselves and each other. Your assistance in filling out this questionnaire will make this survey more accurately reflect our community. Thank you!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (please include area code) \_\_\_\_\_

I estimate the American-Arab population of my area is \_\_\_\_\_

Most American-Arabs I know come from the \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ regions of the Middle East.

Some of the types of work American-Arabs in my community do are:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Major community, religious and ethnic organizations in my community.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Names, addresses and phone numbers of other American-Arabs in my community who might be able to help you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I am already an ADC member.
- ☐ Please sign me up as an ADC member.
- ☐ Please send material telling me more about ADC.

## Memories are Made of This: The ADC Oral History Project

One of our precious resources in the Arab-American community is the memories of our friends and relatives, from their experiences. Particularly valuable for us are the memories of people who lived through two marking experiences in the Arab-American community: **The Passage**, the great wave of immigration at the turn of the century, and **The Exodus**, the flight from political persecution in more recent times. Please let us know if you know someone who can tell you stories of their own experience, and if there is a way you can share those memories with us. Fill out this form to keep us posted:

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of person to be interviewed \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (please include area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Age (approximately) \_\_\_\_\_ Year of arrival \_\_\_\_\_

From where \_\_\_\_\_

Major subject areas (for instance, recollections from the Middle East, experience of arrival, discrimination, first jobs, and so on) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any old diaries, books, letters, or photos you can share with us? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**“For our parents and grandparents who  
came to this new world bringing nothing but  
their love for our heritage and a hope for  
the future. And for our children, to whom  
we bequeath that love and that hope.”**

**—Dedication**